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# THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN



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F

# THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN

BY  
**THOMAS COBB**  
AUTHOR OF "CARPET COURTSHIP"  
"MR. PASSINGHAM," ETC.



V.C.

JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1899

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# THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN

## CHAPTER I

Although her daughter was taller than herself, Mrs. Christopherson still felt like a young woman.

And she was very handsome; of a comely figure with a tendency to *embonpoint*, with dark brown hair free from the slightest trace of gray, and no sign of a wrinkle in her somewhat warmly tinted skin.

Far from attempting to keep Helen back, the fact was she had taken advantage of her womanly appearance to "bring her out" early, with the result that Helen was already affianced to Mr. Barbrook.

In order to gratify her daughter, Mrs. Christopherson had hired this autumn a furnished house on the cliff at Elderstrand. One after-

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noon in August she was standing at its drawing-room window expecting the arrival of Maurice Vaughan in the waggonette which she had sent to meet the train at Rookingham, three miles distant. Mrs. Christopherson had known Maurice many years. Besides being her intimate friend, he was her physician in ordinary; a quite honorary appointment. She felt eager to relieve her mind by confiding to his sympathetic ears the burden which at present oppressed it.

The old-fashioned waggonette was driven in at the gate, and as it stopped at the door a man of about twenty-six years of age alighted. He was tall, sparely built, with smooth, fairish hair and an alert, shaven face.

He wore a brown homespun suit which Mrs. Christopherson, who was in the habit of noticing such details, perceived had already done duty during previous seasons. Nevertheless there was an appearance of smartness about Maurice. Whilst the old coachman lifted down his portmanteau he entered the drawing-room, offering his right hand with a cheerful smile. "How is Helen?" he asked.



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Mrs. Christopherson sat down on the sofa with the slight, but quite perceptible, rustle of skirts which seemed to characterise all her movements. Her hands were small, but plump and white. She threw them out with a gesture which might have signified that the end of all things was come. "I think she has lost her senses!" she exclaimed.

"What are the symptoms?" asked Maurice, resting his palms on his hips and looking down at her agitated face.

"That is really the only way I can account for her conduct," said Mrs. Christopherson.

"What has she been doing?"

"She declares she won't marry Mr. Barbrook," cried Mrs. Christopherson, looking as if she hardly expected him to believe such a statement.

"Well, I'm not sure that's a sign of insanity, you know," said Maurice, with a satisfied laugh. "What reason does she give?" he added, sitting down on the ottoman in the middle of the room.

"None. None whatever. She simply insisted she wouldn't marry the man."

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"When was that?"

"Last night."

"She has not been engaged very long, then," Maurice suggested.

"Three weeks," said Mrs. Christopherson, helplessly, "and we expect Mr. Barbrook here to-morrow."

"He will have to go away again."

"Nonsense!" she retorted, with considerable warmth. "It is the whim of a child——"

"Of a marriageable age, though."

"Helen is so changeable," exclaimed Mrs. Christopherson. "She always gives way in the end. I must say that for her. I had much the same trouble in the first place."

"The game seems hardly worth the candle," he remarked.

"I am sure I don't know what you mean, Maurice. Mr. Barbrook," she insisted, "is the most suitable husband I can imagine for Helen."

"A little old, perhaps?"

"Ah, you are still young enough to call forty old," she rejoined.

"Forty!"

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"He may be forty-one or forty-two. Really, I have not seen his certificate of birth. The more I see of him the better I like him. He is an excellent man——"

"A millionaire to boot," Maurice suggested.

"Yes," she said, with a deeply drawn sigh. "It is a wonderful chance for a girl in her first season. But Helen is so difficult."

Maurice leaned forward resting his arms on his knees.

"The fact is, she has never been very keen on it," he suggested.

"Keen!" cried Mrs. Christopherson. "I sat up till three o'clock in the morning, and even then she yielded with a very ill grace. Afterwards, of course, she was pleased enough."

"What was she pleased about?" he demanded, rather abruptly.

"Such lovely presents," she returned. "Such jewellery! Everybody congratulated her, and as for Josiah himself, I am sure he worships the ground she walks on. Helen has been as happy as the days were long——"

"There haven't been many," said Maurice.

"Until yesterday," Mrs. Christopherson



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continued. "He wrote to say he would arrive to-morrow, and when I showed her his letter, she coolly informed me she had changed her mind—changed her mind!" repeated Mrs. Christopherson with withering contempt, "and that nothing should induce her to marry him."

"Still, she must have a reason," he insisted.

"Then she keeps it very carefully to herself. Besides, they parted on the most excellent terms ten days ago, the evening before we left London."

"Is there—is there anybody else?" he asked with a little hesitation.

"No one. I am positive about that. And Patty quite agrees with me."

"Is Miss Winter here?"

"Miss Winter!" she expostulated. "Anybody would imagine you and my niece were strangers. Yes, I thought the change would be good for her. Patty," she explained, "usually takes a holiday engagement when Miss Parfitt's school breaks up. As I had a room to spare, I invited her here. Patty is such an excellent needlewoman, Maurice, and there will be so many things to provide for Helen's

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trousseau, you understand, that I thought she would be useful."

"You are determined to take time by the forelock, anyhow."

"Of course," Mrs. Christopherson continued, "your being here will be very nice for Patty. A dear, sweet girl, Maurice. An admirable wife for a doctor. Such an unselfish, gentle, helpful creature. The way she has worked during the last ten days—and now to think Helen should behave in this manner."

"Oh, well, I suppose there's been a quarrel," he suggested.

"I defy anyone to quarrel with Josiah," she rejoined. "He is good nature personified. Of course, a man with his income ought to be good-tempered——"

"It depends more on the digestion," said Maurice.

"To tell you the truth," Mrs. Christopherson continued, "she has never treated him exactly as he had a right to expect."

"Hasn't she?" he asked cheerfully.

"But perhaps men prefer a little coyness—from the women they marry. Now," she ex-

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claimed, "you see what a dreadful situation I am placed in. Here is Helen as provokingly obstinate as a child can be, and Josiah coming to-morrow. What should you advise me to do, Maurice?"

"Write to Barbrook and tell him not to come," was the prompt reply.

"I could not treat any man so shamefully," she insisted. "Besides, can you call such conduct reasonable?"

"Oh, well——"

"To accept a man three weeks ago, and now to say she won't marry him—without the slightest reason. No," said Mrs. Christopherson, "it is just the changeable way she used to behave as a small child; only then," she added, "I always used to give her something——"

"I'm afraid," he said, "neither poppy nor mandragora——"

"Can you tell me it is the act of a rational being?" Mrs. Christopherson demanded. "I tell Helen she is acting like a spoilt child," she added.

"What does she say to that?"

"She laughs. She puts her arm round my

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neck and laughs. Helen always had such loving ways," she said with a sigh. "She says she likes being spoilt."

"It doesn't seem to have injured her," Maurice answered.

"Of course she's a dear girl," Mrs. Christopherson admitted, "and I do believe I have a great deal of influence over her. She always has been dutiful enough to give way to me, and there are still twenty-four hours before Josiah's arrival."

As Mrs. Christopherson spoke, the two girls passed the drawing-room windows on their way to the door. A few minutes later Miss Patty Winter entered the room alone.

## CHAPTER II

Mrs. Christopherson admired nothing more than a sturdy spirit of independence. Of course, every rule has its exception, and there may be occasions when even the truth becomes inconvenient.

In the case of Helen, for instance, who was not yet eighteen years of age, a tendency to lean upon her mother might be eminently desirable; but Patty Winter's determination to be self-supporting had always appeared to Mrs. Christopherson as quite beyond praise.

At one time it had seemed that Patty, the only child of a sister who was misguided enough to choose love in a cottage, or worse, in a suburban jerry-built house—it had seemed that Patty might become a serious encumbrance to Mrs. Christopherson.

Mrs. Winter, having outlived her husband a year, died seven years ago, when Patty was

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eighteen. Herself already widowed, Mrs. Christopherson's income barely sufficed to maintain that position in society to which she was accustomed. An agreeable surprise was in store for her, however, when Patty became a resident governess at the school which she had left only the previous year.

So that, with a brief interval, Patty had, in one capacity or another, spent most of her time at Miss Parfitt's school at Bayswater from her eighth year to her twenty-fifth. There she was at present comfortably housed, fairly well paid, and to all appearances contented.

Mrs. Christopherson consoled herself with the assurance that her niece had no desire unfulfilled. It is the fate of some shrewd persons to be rather gullible. Mrs. Christopherson passed for a clever woman, but she was too confident in her own judgment of character to look below the surface.

She could read Patty as if she were a largely printed book, without, however, attempting to look between the lines. To understand Miss Winter, indeed, appeared to be an extremely simple matter. She never complained. Ques-

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tioned about the school, she could always return a cheerful answer, frequently an amusing anecdote; and she invariably looked contented. She could listen to Mrs. Christopherson's domestic woes without retorting with a history of her own.

She was at least sympathetic. Even Mrs. Christopherson admitted that she possessed a pair of fine dark eyes, her only passable feature, indeed! Her face was a little pale, but not from delicate health, broad at the forehead, short, and almost pointed towards the chin. Helen said it was a heart-shaped face. The nose was small and indefinite, the mouth rather large. Her dresses, as Mrs. Christopherson allowed, always fitted her, a little loosely, perhaps, because her form was slight. Nevertheless it possessed attractive curves, and though Patty Winter was small, she missed insignificance. A certain self-contained sedateness was her characteristic, yet there was no suggestion of old-maidishness. Mrs. Christopherson always said that no one could imagine Patty was a schoolmistress, and accordingly welcomed her niece to Grandison Street on Sunday evenings.

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She had quite decided upon Patty's future. She was eventually to marry Maurice Vaughan, who seemed, however, a little decided against marriage in general. Still these two had always been excellent friends, and a few weeks at a country house might work wonders.

It is certain that Miss Winter had not reached her twenty-fifth year without lamenting the fact. She read a great deal, and by way of relaxation she read novels in French and English. She knew of a distant world of love and romance, even though she had not early found admission to it.

She entered the drawing-room with a smile of greeting for Maurice. Her dark blue frock was simply made; her hair, which looked quite black, was loosely coiled on the nape of her long, brown-tinted neck. She wore a hat that seemed to be fashioned of plaited drab rushes, with a black velvet band. It was difficult to realize that she was twenty-five.

"Isn't Helen coming to speak to Maurice?" exclaimed Mrs. Christopherson, with some acerbity.

Patty answered in a pleasantly low voice,



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"She felt rather tired, auntie. Poor Helen!" she added, with the shadow of a smile.

"I really don't consider it a case for pity," said Mrs. Christopherson. "I suppose she didn't condescend to give you any reason for her conduct."

"The reason is obvious."

"'I do not love thee, Dr. Fell,'" remarked Maurice.

"One can't have everything in this world," said Mrs. Christopherson. "That is a mistake young people make. You all expect too much."

"Nice to have the thing you want, though," Maurice suggested.

"Pray, what does Helen want?" demanded Mrs. Christopherson. "She doesn't know what she wants."

"Does that make any difference?" cried Patty. "I mean," she explained, "one may feel quite conscious of deficiency without knowing its nature."

"When I want a thing," said Mrs. Christopherson, "I always know exactly what it is. So does every sensible person, I imagine."

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Really, I have no patience with such nonsense," she exclaimed, rising with an impetuosity which seemed to confirm the assertion. Walking to the door, she quitted the room.

"Is that your own experience?" asked Maurice, with a smile, turning towards Patty, as he closed the door.

"I haven't had any experiences," she said. "I plod along day after day, year after year, always the same. I suppose it always will be the same."

"Still one recognises the personal note," he insisted. "You have felt this aching void!"

"If I had, you may be sure I should die rather than admit it," she said. "But I am used to children, and I flatter myself I understand them."

"You regard Helen as a child, then!"

"I have pupils who are older, but none nearly half so sweet."

"Oh, it is easy to believe that," said Maurice.

"Are you still at the hospital?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I am still hanging on. I want to get on the staff, you know, so I'm like Mr.

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Micawber, waiting for something to turn up."

"I am sure you must feel very sorry at my aunt's tribulation," she suggested, with a demure expression.

"I fancy Mrs. Christopherson put on too much pressure in the first place," he said.

"Of course, Helen never cared for Mr. Barbrook," Patty answered. "She liked his presents and the envy of her friends. Now that she has been out of the excitement for a week or more, she has found time for reflection."

"What about Barbrook?"

"I have only seen him three or four times," she rejoined, "on my Sunday visits to Grandison Street."

"Will he be broken-hearted?" asked Maurice.

"He admires Helen immensely. That's not very difficult, is it?"

"Not very," he admitted.

"He always seems to treat her as if she were a toy."

"Barbrook's too old for toys," said Maurice.

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"It isn't a question of age," she returned.  
"And, besides, Mr. Barbrook is in the prime of life."

"You rather like the fellow, in fact," he suggested.

"But you don't."

"Oh, he's a decent chap enough," said Maurice, "but——"

"Well?" she demanded.

"I don't think I'll criticise."

"I quite understand what you mean," she exclaimed. "You intend to insinuate that he is not quite a gentleman."

"We're all gentlemen nowadays," said Maurice. "At any rate, he's in luck. He has gained a staunch partisan."

"Yes, I like him," answered Patty, with her simple directness.

"Now, why?" asked Maurice.

"He always looks interested while I am talking. He isn't like some persons who ask a question and turn away before I have time to answer. My aunt sometimes laments about his manners, but I never quite understand what she sees to find fault with."

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"I suppose Helen is rather upset," Maurice suggested.

"I have never seen her more cheerful," said Patty.

"That is saying a great deal."

"It is my aunt who contributes the tears," Patty continued. "Oh, dear, it was dreadful last night! His letter arrived by the last post. In the midst of Auntie's encomiums and plans for his entertainment, Helen calmly announced her decision. It was a bolt from the blue."

The entrance of a servant with afternoon tea interrupted them at this point, and Maurice rose, expecting Helen's appearance on the scene.

### CHAPTER III

Helen Christopherson's was the beauty of the budding rose. Her cousin had often considered the matter critically, yet without prejudice.

Herself a brunette, she admired Helen's fairer skin, her wholesome colour, bright blue eyes, and the wealth of hair which was not quite dark enough to be red, though it was much too dark to be golden.

Of medium height or less, Patty almost envied her cousin's extra inches, and the prettily dignified figure which seemed to lend piquancy to her youth. Patty marvelled sometimes that, as Mrs. Christopherson proudly informed her, men of all ages should find such a charm in Helen's obvious inexperience. For, in spite of her mother's tutelage, Helen, with the form of a beautiful woman, remained essentially a child.

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There lay the clue to her somewhat wayward irresponsibility.

A month ago, indeed, Patty regarded her as she might have regarded any of Miss Parfitt's senior pupils. And she had governed intercourse accordingly.

But you cannot treat as a child a young lady who is to be married in three months, and as soon as Patty heard definite news of the betrothal, her manner toward Helen entirely changed.

As they strolled in the evening together by the sea, the waves breaking rhythmically at their feet, the sun sinking gloriously toward the western horizon, when the sky was deeply blue and the haunts of men seemed very distant, Patty discussed the whole duty of woman with immense solemnity.

She spoke of happy love, of wedded life as she remembered it in her own dear home, where, amidst many hardships and constant sickness, happiness had always prevailed, and it might have seemed that she was endeavouring to awaken Helen to the infinite possibilities of this much-abused world. It might have

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seemed that Patty, wise in her five years' seniority, was sparing no effort, whilst there was yet time, to compel Helen to ask herself whether she was not on the brink of an enormous mistake.

On one such occasion, a magnificent evening three or four days previous to Maurice's arrival, when the sea lay like a sheet of glass below them, and the sky hung cloudless above, Helen, without any definite intention, carried the war into the other's country.

"Are you glad Maurice is coming?" she said.

"Why, of course," answered Patty.

"But very, very glad?"

"I like Maurice immensely," said Patty.

"Better than anybody else?" Helen persisted. "Because, you know what my mother wishes."

"Don't be ridiculous, dear," Patty exclaimed.

"Why is it ridiculous?" said Helen, regarding her cousin affectionately. "If I were a man——"

Helen became silent as Patty came to a standstill.



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"What a little hypocrite you are," she said.

"I am taller than you," Helen rejoined, "and I am not a hypocrite."

"Do you mean to look into my face and tell me you don't know Maurice's secret?" Patty demanded.

"Of course, I know he is anxious to get on the staff——"

"He doesn't make a secret of that," cried Patty, with a laugh. "And he wouldn't trouble about the hospital in competition with you."

After a quick exclamation of perfectly genuine surprise, Helen's face grew radiant. There could be no misconception of Patty's meaning now. And after a few minutes she found no difficulty in assimilating this early fruit of the tree of knowledge.

"But," she said presently, "if Maurice—if what you say is true, why has he never betrayed one sign of it?"

"You did not give him time. You are slipping from the schoolroom to your husband's house."

"Besides, he has hardly been to see us lately.

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I hadn't seen him for months until a fortnight ago," urged Helen.

"There has not been much opportunity since you came out," said Patty. "Maurice is devoted to his work. He almost lives at the hospital. Besides, you know the life he is compelled to lead."

Helen said no more. But she became quite unwontedly thoughtful during the ensuing few days, rather low-spirited, Mrs. Christopherson remarked, until, having issued her ultimatum last night, the girl's spirits seemed to rebound.

Mrs. Christopherson was necessarily innocent of what was taking place in her daughter's mind, as in Patty's. She ascribed Helen's conduct to sheer waywardness. Three weeks ago she had protested that nothing should induce her to engage herself to Mr. Barbrook. She had undergone the process which Mrs. Christopherson described as listening to reason, and finally, at half-past three in the morning, she yielded. In the same manner Mrs. Christopherson actually expected to succeed a second time. She was not herself in a mood to act very consistently. She argued as if Helen was

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a woman of the world, and upbraided as if she was a small child; tried to tempt her by pictures of a brilliant career, to frighten her with a description of the penalties of such a gross breach of faith. Mrs. Christopherson alternately railed and cajoled. She threatened to compel Helen to marry Josiah whether she would or not, and the next minute declared that she might go her own way for once and for all. When Helen refused to come downstairs at tea time, Mrs. Christopherson forbade her to leave her room that day; but at seven o'clock a reprimand was administered, inasmuch as she had not begun to dress for dinner.

To Maurice this evening Helen appeared, as usual, like a bright apparition on the field of his work-a-day life. She had ever greeted him like a light-hearted child, whilst many women might envy her figure. For the first time she betrayed a self-consciousness, this evening, which he attributed to a suspicion that Mrs. Christopherson had confided in him.

A few commonplaces were exchanged as their hands met, then Maurice offered his arm to his hostess. During dinner and afterwards he

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scrupulously avoided Barbrook's name, and the delicate subject was not alluded to until the following morning.

After breakfast they were left to their own devices. Patty retired to a small room where she usually passed the mornings with the sewing-machine, the cat, and her maiden meditations. Mrs. Christopherson always disappeared from view for an hour or two. The servants required a great deal of generalship; they had been hired with the house, and she could not get rid of a suspicion that they partook of the nature of detectives.

The house itself was all that could be desired—of one storey, square and capacious, with a tennis lawn dividing its creeper-covered front from the road.

The rambling, old-fashioned garden formed a perpetual delight to Helen. There were glass houses for grapes and tomatoes; and the flower garden was split up into narrow alleys between tall hedges, resembling the windings of a maze. These led to a green door, which opened abruptly on the cliff.

In the highest spirits, Helen played cicerone

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to Maurice this morning, compelling him to visit the glass houses, to perambulate the vegetable garden, and lose himself in the maze. At last she ordered him to shut his eyes, and, hastening forward to open the green door, took his left hand, leading him mysteriously to its threshold.

"Now you may look!" she exclaimed. "At the sea, I mean," she added, as his gaze rested on her face.

There was no cloud on the morning sky. The panorama of the sea, with one or two steamers on the horizon and a few tan-colored sails closer to the shore, lay spread out below them.

"Now I will show you the way down to the sands," she cried.

She nimbly descended the path on the face of the cliff, practicable here because of a former landslip. "That's my tent," she said, indicating a small white canvas structure. On reaching it, she fastened back the flap, and, stooping to enter, brought forth a hammock-chair. "There's only one," she said.

Maurice sat down on the sand by its side,

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and taking out his pipe began to fill it with an air of leisurely enjoyment.

"When do you expect Barbrook, Nell?" he asked, striking a match.

"You know," she said, looking down at the sand, "you're the only one who ever calls me so now."

"What time is he coming?" Maurice persisted.

"By the train which brought you yesterday."

"Are you going to Rookingham to meet him?"

"Isn't the sea splendid!" she cried. "I love to watch its changing face. It smiles and laughs and frowns and storms in turn. Yesterday it lay like a looking-glass——"

"And behold it was beautiful when you looked at it."

"To-day," she continued, "it just smiles. I could sit watching it for hours, without a word."

"That's the test of friendship," said Maurice.

"What is?"

"The ability to be silent together."

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"Isn't it a shame Patty mustn't come out?" she suggested.

"She seems immensely busy."

"And such a wasted effort," said Helen.

"Of course," she added, "I know my mother tells you everything."

"I suggested she should prevent Barbrook from coming," he answered. "Nell," he continued, "I wish I could see into your mind."

"I'm not at all sure that would be pleasant."

"For me or for you?"

She began to bury her right hand in the loose sand.

"I don't intend to marry him," she said quietly.

"Why have you changed your mind?" he demanded.

"You surely don't imagine I shall tell you," she retorted, flushing vividly. "You ought not to ask me."

Maurice smoked a few minutes in silence, then he looked at her whimsically and said:

"I have known you ever since you were born. I listened to your infantile prattle, I watched your first attempts to walk, I——"

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"Don't be ridiculous, Maurice."

"Seriously, then; if you tell Mrs. Christopherson your reason frankly, you will take a good deal of wind out of her sails."

"I have told her," said Helen. "At least I have given what ought to be a sufficient reason."

"That you don't care for the fellow?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Christopherson insists that you did care for him ten days ago," he suggested.

"I didn't," she said.

"Then why did you have anything to do with him?"

"I let myself be talked into it. Everyone does foolish things sometimes. It was very childish," she said, with a deprecatory air.

"Now you're three weeks older."

"One—one suddenly sees things differently," she explained. "It's like construing; one word gives the clue."

"Who spoke that significant word?" asked Maurice.

"I saw that other girls wanted him," Helen continued hastily. "I am afraid I liked to cut them out."



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"And now?"

"Oh, they may scramble for him!"

"Now, that sounds rather contemptuous," Maurice suggested.

"There's only one person in the world I really despise," she said.

"That shows the difference the point of view makes, Nell."

"I am sure you must rather despise me," she said.

"I don't think I do—very much," he assured her. "You see, you are just yourself."

"Anyhow, I don't feel the slightest contempt for Josiah," she answered. "I have a kind of respect for him."

"Yet you don't mean to marry him?" asked Maurice, rather eagerly.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she exclaimed, with a shudder. "My mother says I am bound in honour."

"To marry a man you feel a personal antipathy to?"

"She insists that is nonsense."

"If you had to choose between Barbrook

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and sudden death," he cried warmly, " don't hesitate a moment—choose death."

" How solemn you look, Maurice," she said, mimicking his expression.

" It's a serious matter," he answered.

" Still, you should cultivate a light manner, you know."

" I suppose I'm by way of becoming heavy-handed," he said. " A few years at a London hospital has that effect, you know."

" You have to forget the hospital now," she rejoined. " You have neglected us shamefully; but now you are here, my mother expects you to stay a month. And you're to marry Patty, you know."

" So that's the idea!"

" I shall be able to be her bridesmaid now," Helen continued. " I have never been anyone's bridesmaid."

" But Barbrook," he reminded her.

" I shall speak to him directly he arrives," she answered, suddenly grave. " But," she cried, " I can't tell you how I dread it. Sometimes I feel I would sooner marry him than tell him I can't."

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As she spoke, Patty began to descend the path from the top of the cliff.

"You are wanted indoors," she cried, drawing near to Helen.

"Who wants me?"

"Auntie."

With an apprehensive sigh, Helen rose from the hammock-chair.

"I suppose I must go," she said, and Patty lingered by the tent as Helen began to ascend.

"Afraid it's war to the knife," remarked Maurice.

"You're afraid!" cried Patty, raising her eyebrows. "Your looks belie you. You don't look very sorry."

"I don't believe in peace at any price," he answered. "Helen intends to pronounce sentence directly Barbrook arrives."

"Unless her mother prevails," said Patty.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You see my aunt approves of Fabian tactics. She who hesitates is lost. She is going to try to induce Helen to temporize."

"She won't succeed," Maurice insisted.

Patty shrugged her shoulders.

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" I don't feel sure," she said, turning towards the path by which she had descended.

Maurice carried the chair into the tent and refastened the flap. Then, thrusting his hands in his pockets, he strolled along the sands. His circumstances militated against his marriage. He possessed a small amount of capital, which as at present invested barely enabled him to maintain a respectable appearance. Not that he regarded this as the least hardship. It was a matter of deliberate choice. He could have realised his capital to purchase a practice had he been so minded. But he had ambitious hopes and a passion for surgery. His aim was to obtain a post on the hospital staff, such as a Registrarship or a Clinical Assistantship, not for the sake of the immediate remuneration, which would be trivial, but in the hope of advancing step by step, and thus attaining an eminent position some day.

In consequence he endured considerable present inconvenience. But he was confident in his own skill, and the necessary experience could not otherwise be obtained. At the moment, however, Maurice was merely a hanger-on at

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the hospital—one of some half a dozen young men awaiting the chance of a vacancy—haunting the wards, witnessing operations, occasionally assisting.

Now it is obvious that marriage was not included in his programme. It was, indeed, possible to marry, if he realised his capital and purchased a practice.

But until he heard (with a pang) the news of Helen's engagement, he had scarcely considered her of an age to marry. Six months ago she had seemed to be still a child.

He began to realise, however, that he had lost his chance. Or was it really a chance? At all events, life became duller; he fixed his thoughts more intently on his career, until Mrs. Christopherson unexpectedly invited him to Elderstrand.

His first impulse was to refuse the invitation; but finally he yielded to the enticement of passing a month with Helen, even though Barbrook was to form one of the party.

Nothing could have exceeded his surprise when Mrs. Christopherson greeted him with the news of Helen's revolt. Her own de-

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meanour this morning had enlightened him further concerning her relationship to Barbrook.

And now he speculated as to what would follow the dismissal of her *fiancé*. The case might be presented to him in the form of a contest betwixt love and ambition. The two were incompatible, and Maurice could not relinquish either without a struggle. First, however, it was necessary to understand Helen's mind; and at present this seemed no easy matter.

## CHAPTER IV

An angry woman is always at a disadvantage. Nothing but a firm belief in this truism could have induced Mrs. Christopherson to strive at least for a semblance of good humour. Time pressed, and the matter was far too serious to be trifled with. The morning was slipping away, and in a few hours it would be necessary to set forth to Rookingham. Mrs. Christopherson intended to make a few purchases in the town, meeting Josiah at the railway station on her way home.

In the meantime she had to deal with this rebellious daughter of hers.

The low drawing-room windows stood open, the room was fragrant with the scent of roses. Mrs. Christopherson sat in the middle of the large sofa, and regarded Helen more in sorrow than in anger.

It was a splendid example of self-control!

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Though the sight of Helen agitated her to an intense degree, she maintained an appearance of admirable self-possession.

"I want you to sit down and have a serious talk, my love," she said.

"We had so many serious talks yesterday," rejoined Helen, sitting down rather wearily.

"My dear girl," Mrs. Christopherson continued, "my only object in life is your happiness—your real, lasting welfare."

"Yes, mother, I know; but——"

"If I seemed a little impatient yesterday, you must forgive me, Helen. I have had far more experience than you. When I look back, I see how foolish and ignorant I was at seventeen, though I fancied I was very wise, as you do now, no doubt."

This gentler manner appealed to Helen more forcibly than any repetition of yesterday's tactics could have done. We have seen Mrs. Christopherson only in a time of painful stress. In the ordinary course of things she was gentle and indulgent; her influence over Helen was naturally considerable.

"Heaven forbid," she continued, "that I



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should persuade you into a distasteful marriage. But I can't be blind to the advantages Josiah's wife must enjoy. Of course, if you really feel a repugnance——"

"I do, mother, dear."

Encouraged by the alteration in her mother's tone, and being in a mood when sympathy was very precious, Helen left her chair and, coming to Mrs. Christopherson's side, kneeled down, resting her hands on her knees.

"Tell me why, darling."

She was not quite a hypocrite, and from first to last she acted from a desire to promote what she honestly regarded as Helen's real welfare. Realising the futility of yesterday's tactics, she had taken herself to task and determined on a different strategy. She would not lose her temper to-day. But once having regained self-control, it required no hypocrisy to speak endearingly to Helen. To-day was the rule, yesterday the exception.

"I can't tell you why," said Helen, "except that I loathe the idea."

"Then I have no more to say," was the answer. "But is that really the case?" she

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asked in a breath. "You know, dear, you are always rather impulsive. You have not seen Josiah for ten days, and last time you met you seemed quite contented. Besides, you owe something to him. He chose you from among scores of other girls. He is very fond of you."

"I know, mother. I see that. But what else can I do?" cried Helen.

"Nothing. He must hear the truth, however painful. There is no question of marrying him against your will. Nobody can force you. All I ask is that you will not act hastily and regret it later."

"I shall never regret it," Helen insisted.

"Naturally," Mrs. Christopherson continued, "I want to see you well married, and I know the things that really matter. But you are young and very sweet, dear, and I don't think I need feel anxious about you. Only, you have engaged yourself to Josiah, and I really think you owe it to him that you shall not act hastily."

"If I have made up my mind," said Helen, "surely I ought to act at once."

"There you are wrong," answered Mrs.

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Christopherson, as if she respected Helen's opinion whilst she differed from it. "To receive him, when he comes so expectantly, with his dismissal on your lips—that seems really almost brutal. Even though you are quite determined, that is scarcely the way to set about it."

"What do you think I ought to do, then?" Helen asked.

As long as Mrs. Christopherson had been angry and coercive, she could stand her ground and show a bold front to the enemy. But when the enemy appeared a friend, Helen was inclined to fall back into the customary habit of obedience. She was not sufficiently far from childhood to have outgrown this habit completely.

She at least began to show a tendency to discuss the question temperately, none the less because she believed she was about to deal Josiah a severe blow. Her ultimate intention was fixed and unalterable. Nothing on earth should induce her to discuss that point, although she might be open to advice as to the wisest method of achieving freedom.

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"I admit that sooner or later you must speak quite frankly," said Mrs. Christopherson, "unless you change your mind."

"I never shall," answered Helen.

"But don't act impulsively. Don't say anything to-day. Let Josiah stay here. You will see whether your feelings change towards him."

"They won't change, mother."

"In that case," said Mrs. Christopherson, "I shall take the matter out of your hands. If you let Josiah stay, as we intended, I will speak to him before he goes away."

Helen caught eagerly at this suggestion. For the moment she could think of nothing but the relief of avoiding an exceedingly unpleasant duty. To shift the ordeal on to her mother was in itself a great temptation. But as she kneeled with her arms on Mrs. Christopherson's knees, she suddenly raised her eyes.

"I—I can't," she murmured, flushing vividly.

"Why not, darling?"

"I can't meet him as—as if I had not

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changed my mind. I can't let him stay here and treat me as—as if——”

“I quite understand,” said her mother, “and I admit that I believe you will regret all this before twenty-four hours have passed. Even if you don't—well, you are not a baby, after all. And Josiah won't be our only guest. You can't leave Maurice entirely to himself. Helen,” Mrs. Christopherson continued, passing a hand caressingly over her daughter's head, “I want you to please me in this. It will be an immense disappointment to me in any case, but I will never utter a word of reproach, and I promise to take the matter out of your hands in the end.”

She fully intended to keep her word. If Helen persisted, there must be an end to the affair. But she hoped that Helen would not persist. She hoped that once he arrived, not unprovided with a present calculated to please any woman, Helen would prove as tractable as she had done hitherto.

And for Helen the proposal had its temptations. Moreover, and she admitted it to his credit, Josiah had ever treated her with a re-

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spect which approached humility. He begged as a favor for what he might have claimed as his prerogative.

"May I talk it over with Patty?" Helen suggested.

"I really don't see what Patty has to do with it," said Mrs. Christopherson.

But Helen regarded Patty as her guide, philosopher, and friend. No one else had ever spoken freely to her about love and marriage. Patty seemed to be an authority on this occult subject, and perhaps Helen believed that her cousin would side against her mother.

"I should like to hear what she thinks," Helen insisted.

"Then, if you go to your room, I will send her," said Mrs. Christopherson, "though she seems the very last person in the world to have an opinion on such a subject."

As Helen left the drawing-room Mrs. Christopherson went in search of Patty, who had reëntered the house and returned to the work-room—a small room, rather shabbily furnished, containing a dinner waggon, a sewing-machine, and three odd chairs. Taking one of these,

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Mrs. Christopherson enlightened Patty concerning what had passed during the recent interview.

"The great thing," she concluded, "is to gain time. Helen wishes to consult you. She seems to attach considerable value to your opinion."

"Very nice of her, Auntie."

"I thought I would prepare you," said Mrs. Christopherson. "And I trust you will do your utmost to convince her, Patty."

Laying aside her needlework, Patty stared out into the garden, her white forehead puckered, as it was apt to be in moments of perplexity. Nobody had a sincerer wish to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number than Miss Winter. But the best intentioned persons may be influenced by motives which are unrecognised by themselves. Patty raised her hands to push back her hair, and sighed slightly as she left the room.

Mrs. Christopherson stepped out at the open window and walked to the tennis lawn in front of the house. At one end of it stood a large sycamore tree, with three ample wicker chairs,

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on one of which Maurice was seated. He had just returned from the beach.

"It is well that I am a patient woman, Maurice," she cried, sitting down by his side.

"Has your patience been rewarded?" he asked dryly.

"Helen is decidedly more tractable this morning," she said.

"Has she changed her mind again?"

"I only want to gain time," she answered.  
"She changes like a chameleon. If she will only consent to let Josiah stay a few weeks——"

"But will she?" he asked eagerly.

"She is certainly wavering. She is now consulting Patty, of all persons in the world."

She quite mistook the significance of Maurice's laugh. She even joined in it, at the idea of the choice of her niece as a counsellor. But Maurice's confidence was restored. He could depend upon Patty. If Helen were guided by her advice nothing could be better.

A few minutes later Patty appeared at the open window of the drawing-room. Seeing Maurice, she hesitated until Mrs. Christopher-son beckoned.



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Now Maurice perceived at once that Patty's face expressed perfect contentment.

"Well?" exclaimed Mrs. Christopherson, and he watched her face as if with a scientific interest in the expression of painful emotion.

"You may as well go to Helen," said Patty.  
"She is still in her room."

"I leave you to amuse Maurice," cried Mrs. Christopherson, as she hastened towards the house.

"Do you require amusing?" asked Patty in her most cheerful tone.

"Tell me about Helen," he urged.

"Poor Helen! She is in a state of collapse," said Patty, with a laugh.

"She has never given in!"

"You see, my aunt is a clever strategist," she rejoined.

"But Mrs. Christopherson said that Helen intended to be guided by your advice."

Patty laughed again, and Maurice thought she had never appeared to such little advantage.

"My aunt rather overrates my influence," she said lightly.

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"You must see that delay is dangerous," he insisted.

"You seem a little anxious about Helen's decision," she remarked.

"I am."

"Now, why should you be anxious, Maurice?"

"I don't want to see her make a mistake," he answered lamely.

"If you imagine she will ever marry Mr. Barbrook," said Patty, "you are utterly mistaken. Helen will never do that."

"You speak positively," he suggested.

"And with knowledge," Patty assured him.

In the meantime Mrs. Christopherson reached Helen's room, and assuming her most tolerant manner, asked the nature of Patty's advice.

"She thought you were right," said Helen, a little unwillingly. "And I am going to do what you ask, mother."

"Bless you, darling!" cried Mrs. Christopherson effusively.

"But I want you to understand——"

"I quite understand, Helen."

"I have not changed my mind."

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"No, no," said Mrs. Christopherson soothingly.

"I never shall," Helen insisted. "I will never marry him. I will keep silence to please you, though it is quite likely I shall betray myself."

"You have taken an immense weight off my mind," said Mrs. Christopherson, kissing her daughter. "Now bathe your eyes and come to luncheon."

## CHAPTER V

Mrs. Christopherson found an opportunity before luncheon to enlighten Maurice. She informed him of Helen's "sweet reasonableness" with great gusto. Mrs. Christopherson had won, and she laughed. Maurice listened with the best grace he found possible. It was not for him to read her a lecture on the whole duty of mothers, and if his reply was a little lukewarm, Mrs. Christopherson felt too self-satisfied to observe it.

"Now," she exclaimed, after luncheon, "I must see about starting. Mr. Barbrook's train is due at 3.35, and I have a great deal of shopping to do first."

When she came down-stairs ready to set forth, the waggonette, with the bony grey horse between the shafts, already stood at the door.

"Really, it is a punishment to have to drive that horse," she said, buttoning her gloves.

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"Why not let the man drive?" suggested Maurice.

"For the simple reason that I do not care to spend three-quarters of an hour covering three miles," she returned. "If ever I take a furnished house again I certainly will not have anything to do with the servants. I feel that I am surrounded by spies. The horse must walk up this hill and down that, and there is very little level road from here to Rookingham."

She mounted to the box-seat and took the reins, smiling amiably to the group at the door as she drove away. Then Patty insisted on going to her workroom, whilst Helen strolled towards the sycamore tree and sat down beneath its shade.

"So you have relented," remarked Maurice, taking a chair by her side.

"Indeed I have done nothing of the kind," she protested.

"Mrs. Christopherson seems to think it will be all plain sailing henceforth," he suggested.

"She can't think that. It is quite impossible," said Helen. "I told her so many times."

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"Then why have you decided not to speak to Barbrook on his arrival?"

"You are cross-examining me," she cried, a little petulantly.

"I beg your pardon, Nell."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," she said.

"Then you give me the right to question you?"

"I fancy you took it long ago," she said, more gently.

"But when a young lady is engaged to be married——"

"I am not, Maurice."

"Anyhow, your *fiancé* is on his way. He will be here in a couple of hours, and—well, don't you think you will find yourself in a rather false position?"

"I have made my mother quite understand it," Helen insisted. "If she deceives herself it isn't my fault."

"Barbrook will hardly see what passes in your mind," said Maurice.

"I think he may."

"Then, in that case, you might as well enlighten him at once and have done with it."

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"I want to please my mother as far as I can," she explained. "She treated me quite differently to-day. She spoke very nicely and kindly. She admitted I was right, but she asked me to take time for reflection. I don't require to reflect," Helen added, "but I like to please her as far as possible."

"You will find the situation full of pitfalls."

"It can't be helped now," she answered; "I only wanted to do what was best."

"And you did what was easiest," said Maurice.

"It won't be very easy."

"What won't?" he asked.

"I hoped Patty would back me up," Helen continued. "But she agreed with my mother. At least, she insisted I ought not to marry him. There was no question of that. But she entreated me not to do anything in a hurry. If her eternal happiness had depended upon it, she could hardly have been more in earnest. Besides, she promised to help me."

"How can she help you, in heaven's name?" Maurice demanded.

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"Well, she can occupy his attention. She can keep him away from me."

"Take the incubus on herself," he suggested.

"My mother always says that Patty is the most accommodating of mortals," said Helen, with a laugh. "Mustn't her life be hateful! Not that she ever seems to mind. She takes everything just as it comes."

"Not excepting Barbrook."

"I daresay she will stay at the school the rest of her days," said Helen.

"She may marry. You see, women are like Bonaparte's soldiers, with a field marshal's baton always in their knapsacks."

"I don't see how Patty can ever marry," Helen answered. "She is twenty-five, and she doesn't see a man from one year to another. Unless," she said, with a glance at Maurice, "you come to the rescue."

A little later Helen insisted that it was necessary to go indoors, and Maurice stood watching her as she crossed the sunny lawn.

He began to feel perplexed about Patty. Why on earth should she persuade Helen to



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temporise? Ten minutes later he strolled round the side of the house and stopped at Patty's open window. She was sitting by the sewing-machine, busily stitching: a picture not without attractiveness. She looked particularly serene and unflurried, glancing up with a smile as Maurice's shadow fell across her work.

"You look industrious," he said, leaning against the lintel.

"I like this room," she answered. "I can hear the murmur of the sea."

"A reproachful murmur," he suggested.

"What have I done?" she exclaimed.

"You have been less candid than usual, anyhow. I have just been hearing all about it."

"They seem to make you a father confessor, Maurice."

"The privilege of my calling," he said. "But you have been lax. You didn't tell me your advice had proved decisive."

"What—what advice?" she asked, bending lower over her needle.

"You urged Helen to meet Mrs. Christopherson's wishes."

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"Well?"

"You know it was bad advice—from Helen's point of view, anyhow."

"I was bound to study my aunt as well," Patty insisted, sewing quickly. "If Helen had not yielded so far, her mother would never have forgiven her."

"Helen seems to be clay in the hands of the potter," he cried impatiently.

Patty rested her work on her knees, looking up at Maurice solemnly.

"Fashion her into a thing of beauty," she said. "You have virgin material. She is capable of large possibilities."

"She will have an unpleasant few weeks now," he retorted.

"Not more unpleasant than before she left London."

"Why didn't you tell me candidly what you had advised Helen to do, Patty?" he asked, looking down at her bowed head.

"Why didn't I receive her confidence one minute to betray it the next?" Patty returned.

"Anyhow, you have secured the pleasure of

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Barbrook's presence for a few weeks," he remarked significantly. "I remember you said you liked the fellow."

"I do," she answered. "I pity him. He always seems so utterly lonely."

"Lonely!" cried Maurice, with a laugh.

"Oh, of course, I know that lots of people court him—for his great possessions. He hasn't a disinterested friend."

"One, at least."

"Even Helen would never have given him a second thought but for his money," she continued quickly. "It must seem rather like Dead Sea fruit."

Maurice stood silent a few moments, then drawing nearer, he rested his hands on the sewing-machine.

"Now, wouldn't it have been better to send him away at once?" he said.

Patty shrugged her shoulders as she stitched.

"You believe he really does desire to marry Helen?" he persisted.

"No doubt," she said.

"And you prefer that his disappointment should be broken gradually."

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"It will be," she retorted. "Helen can't play the hypocrite skilfully."

"Meantime you have promised to assist in bearing her burden," he cried, with a laugh.

"Oh, my business is to get along with the trousseau," said Polly.

"I see you possess a sense of humour," Maurice answered, as he turned away.

## CHAPTER VI

Josiah Barbrook had risen from a very humble position to one of great affluence. From the beginning his career had been one of uninterrupted success, until now, at the comparatively early age of forty-five, his name had a world-wide reputation.

In the United States and in the colonies it was as well known as in the city of London, where his headquarters were more like a palace than the offices of a mercantile firm.

Until the present year, however, his fame had not penetrated far towards the west. Society had known him not. He had carefully minded his own business, continuing to live in a frugal, unostentatious manner, although he possessed means to gratify every desire.

His chief pleasure consisted in his work, and on leaving the City in the afternoon, he looked forward to nothing more eagerly than the return to his offices the following morning.

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Every attempt (and several had been made) to draw him forth from his shell had failed, until Mrs. Jardine, a friend of Mrs. Christopher's, devoted her great energies to the task.

Colonel Jardine was a director of one of the numerous companies with which Barbrook had recently become more or less directly concerned. Meeting Barbrook in Regent Street late one afternoon, Mrs. Jardine compelled her husband to introduce her, and from that day Josiah obtained no peace until he accepted an invitation to dine at her house.

This happened at the beginning of the season which had just ended. Taking Barbrook in hand, Mrs. Jardine launched him successfully, and, like any man who has distinguished himself preëminently, if only in money getting, he met with a ready welcome.

A moderate acquaintance with light literature informed him of awaiting pitfalls. Barbrook was sensitive rather than imitative. Master of the routine of his work in the city, he perceived that he was a neophyte in Mrs. Jardine's drawing-room. He envied the ease

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of other men, and felt hopeless of acquiring it, though he never ceased (sometimes with disastrous results) to endeavour. Characterised by a sturdy independence, in his efforts to accommodate himself to unfamiliar circumstances, he often went to an opposite extreme. Manners were not his strong point, and in his desire to please, he inclined to be too suave and elaborate. He was, however, suffered so gladly, that, clear-sighted man though he might be, he soon ran the risk of having his head turned.

Never married, having lived an ascetic life, he now found himself in something distantly resembling a Mahomet's paradise.

Assured by his mentor that it was his bounden duty to marry and to found a family, he was persuaded that he had only to make his selection amongst the beautiful women to whom he had lately been presented. It was a case of *embarras de richesses*; and whilst Barbrook was shrewd enough to perceive the machinations of certain mothers of daughters, the situation appeared tempting withal.

Helen had attracted him in the first place,

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partly by her aloofness. She was formed to attract most men, but whatever Mrs. Christopherson might do, Helen, at least, showed no sign of a "coming-on" disposition.

He perceived that Mrs. Christopherson was deliberately angling, that she was sparing no effort to catch him; but becoming more and more fascinated by Helen's piquant charm, he soon began to bite.

Then, as now when he had been affianced to her for three weeks, the girl enchanted whilst she tantalized him. He rejoiced to see her eyes sparkle at the sight of the costly gifts which he lavished upon her.

Yet there were lonely moments when he devoutly wished he might live again through those earlier years of struggle and self-denial. The pleasure lay in the chase rather than the quarry.

For the man Josiah Barbrook no one cared a straw, not even Helen. He cherished few illusions. He did not imagine she loved him. He was purchasing his bride, though he congratulated himself on the bargain.

To the matters which the most intimately



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concerned him he durst not allude. It was hard work to find anything interesting to say to her. He would marry her next week if he might, yet he perceived that his presence often bored her, whilst he felt conscious of an incessant strain lest his demeanour should do him discredit.

And the man's heart hungered. He had not begun to feel even the beginning of middle age. He told himself he had barely reached his prime; he was capable of conceiving high possibilities, though in his own case they appeared impossible.

Like Midas, he destroyed the warm life of all he touched. The love of such a woman as now alone could satisfy him was unattainable. He was regarded as a mere source of supply, a means to aggrandizement.

As the day approached for his visit to Elderstrand, he became conscious, nevertheless, of a pleasurable kind of excitement. He ordered clothes profusely, together with the latest things in travelling bags. He paid many visits to his jeweller, and finally set forth in excellent spirits, marred by nervousness withal.

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He had never visited a country house. He was at the beginning of knowledge, since he had become aware of his ignorance. He wondered whether Mrs. Christopherson was entertaining many guests, and how often he should transgress unwritten laws.

Also, he wondered whether Helen would betray any greater warmth after their ten days' separation, and at all events, he felt confident she would be pleased by his present.

Would she come to meet him at the railway station, or was that not the right thing to do in the circumstances? Recognising Mrs. Christopherson on the platform, he wished he had been left to make his way to Elderstrand alone. She always seemed to regard him like a fidgetty maiden aunt watching a schoolboy. Once or twice she had ventured to throw out certain hints which he had taken with as good a grace as possible, really glad of the information, whilst ashamed of its necessity.

Mrs. Christopherson found nothing to object to on the score of his appearance. He was tall, quite six feet in height, broad-shouldered, spare at the waist and hips. He carried his

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"Have you many visitors?" he asked, a few minutes later.

"Only two, and you know them both: Mr. Vaughan and my niece. To tell you the truth," she added confidentially, "Patty and Maurice Vaughan were made for each other. That," she said, as they passed a small modern church beside a larger ruin, "is not our parish church. We went there one Sunday, but the draught was unbearable."

She was soon able to indicate the house, and presently they were driven in at its open gate.

Barbrook felt disappointed not to see Helen at the door, or at least the window.

"This way," cried Mrs. Christopherson briskly, as she reached the door. "Pray be careful not to knock your head. The ceilings of these old-fashioned houses are built so low. Well," she said, entering the drawing-room, "here we are, good people."

## CHAPTER VII

It was a trying moment for Helen, and in a different degree for Maurice. She felt that he was criticising her demeanour, and knew that her cheeks were crimson.

At the moment of Mrs. Christopherson's entrance they stood in a group, Helen between Maurice and Patty. As Barbrook followed his hostess, hat in hand, she stepped slightly forward.

"Good afternoon," she said, as casually as if he had been the most distant acquaintance. He bent from the waist, retaining her hand until Helen withdrew it. Turning to Maurice she continued the conversation which had been interrupted.

"I think you know Mr. Vaughan," cried Mrs. Christopherson hurriedly, "and Miss Winter, of course, you have met several times. Now," she added, "suppose we give you some tea."



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They all sat down, but seeing Maurice rise to hand the cups, Barbrook placed his hat on the floor to follow his example. The two men were constantly in each other's way, whilst Helen persistently talked to Patty, and Mrs. Christopherson made valiant efforts to extract a remark from Josiah.

He felt uncomfortably chilled as he finally returned to his chair. Experience had encouraged a belief that the slightest manifestation of feeling was the last thing to be expected; but it became difficult to resist the opinion that Helen was deliberately snubbing him.

A man can only employ such means as he possesses, and Barbrook bethought him of the contents of a parcel which he had retained in his own possession during the journey from London, and deposited on a table near the door on entering the room.

Of course, it was patent to everyone that it contained a present for his *fiancee*, and as soon as tea was over, each began to contemplate a speedy withdrawal. Mrs. Christopherson was the first to rise, followed by Patty and Maurice, who accompanied her to the lawn.

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Helen made no effort to avoid the *little-à-little*. She perceived it was inevitable, and so she remained seated while Barbrook came to her side.

"I have thought of nothing since you left but the pleasure of meeting you again," he began, placing a hand on the back of her chair.

"One always longs to leave London in August," she said, leaning forward to avoid his contact.

After a pause he remarked:

"You like Elderstrand?"

"We have spent the most delightful ten days," Helen exclaimed.

"I trust you have a still more enjoyable time before you," he said, his manner rather stilted.

After another pause he walked to the table by the door and began to untie the parcel, as if he was accustomed to untying parcels, Helen fancied. He disclosed a jeweller's morocco case, and returning to Helen's side pressed the spring. It contained a necklace consisting of three close strings of very fine diamonds.

"May I beg you to accept this little offering?" he said.

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"Absurd to call it little!" she cried petulantly.

"Little in comparison to your deserts and my admiration," he answered, with an elaborate bow.

She looked very bewitching sitting there like an offended child, her eyes averted as if nothing should induce her to look at the diamonds. As Barbrook stood holding the case, on the impulse of the moment he stooped, kissing her cheek.

She drew back, flushing and trembling. It was by no means the first embrace, and hitherto she had tolerated his not very effusive caresses as a matter of course. But her point of view had entirely changed during the last few days.

Quick to appreciate the slightest rebuff, sensitive amidst his unfamiliar circumstances to an extreme degree, Barbrook stood regarding her with a sense of injury. In vain he looked for the usual manifestation of pleasure at his gift. He had expected to see her eyes brighten at sight of the diamonds, at which she would not condescend even to glance,

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although he still clumsily held the case open before her.

"You would have preferred some other stones," he suggested.

"Oh, no!"

"I hesitated about pearls. If you would like them better——"

"No, thank you," she answered.

"The arrangement of the stones does not meet with your approval."

"Oh, it is very nice," she said.

"I don't pretend to understand this kind of thing myself," he answered. "Mrs. Jardine was kind enough to give me the advantage of her opinion."

"How is Mrs. Jardine?" asked Helen eagerly.

"She is quite well. I feel sure there is something which does not please you," he insisted.

"So many things," she returned. "I am always rather hard to please."

"I usually pull a thing off if once I take it in hand, Helen."

"Still, there must be exceptions," she replied.



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"I've not found many," he said with a good deal of confidence. "And in the present case I am most anxious to succeed. You have hardly examined the necklace. Will you permit me——"

Seeing him take it out of the case, and anticipating a request to fasten it round her neck, Helen walked towards the window.

"You must show it to my mother," she exclaimed; and standing outside the room, she called the others in from the lawn.

If Helen had refrained from doing justice to the necklace, Mrs. Christopherson was overwhelming in her enthusiasm. She had never seen finer stones in her life, although she had enjoyed (it must have been before Helen's day) unusual opportunities of seeing fine diamonds. Helen was an extremely fortunate girl, and did not Patty think so? Taking the necklace from Josiah's hands, she insisted on Maurice's admiration also, making him suddenly envious: for the first time in his life. But it was impossible not to envy Barbrook the power to lay such offerings at the feet of his goddess, and Maurice realised dismally how

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very many years must pass before he could hope to gratify himself in that way.

With the diamonds sparkling in her hands, Mrs. Christopherson turned to Helen.

"Let me put them round your neck," she said, but the girl drew back. Although she had consented to refrain for the present from telling Josiah her decision, she could not bring herself to act as if this had not been formed.

"Patty," she exclaimed, "you put them on."

Mrs. Christopherson darted a reproachful glance at her daughter. If she intended to behave in this way, she might as well speak to Barbrook openly and have done with it. To make the best of the situation, however, Mrs. Christopherson turned to Patty.

"Yes, you put the necklace on, Patty," she said, "and then Helen will be able to see how it looks."

Patty approached her aunt and stood quite still whilst Mrs. Christopherson fastened the diamonds round her neck.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" she cried, stepping backwards admiringly. "Really, I hardly know

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you, Patty. Don't they suit her splendidly, Maurice? Ah, fine feathers make fine birds."

As Patty stood in the middle of the group, Helen found it impossible not to admire the necklace. Her cousin seemed to rise to the occasion. She held her head high, her usually pale face was becomingly flushed, and for the first time Barbrook looked at her with close attention.

During his visits to Grandison Street he had met Patty on several Sunday evenings before and since he asked Helen to be his wife. He had exchanged a few words with her without receiving any definite impression of her personality.

Helen had engrossed his complete attention, and Patty's only claim to interest had been her relationship to Miss Christopherson. Now she acquired a distinct individuality in his eyes. Barbrook was feeling far from comfortable. Helen's reception acted like a cold douche upon him, and he felt like a stranger in an unenticing land.

As he gazed at the diamonds on Patty's neck, then at her face, their eyes met. Now

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Miss Winter's eyes were dark, deep, and sympathetic, and Mr. Barbrook happened to be in a mood when sympathy was peculiarly welcome.

"Are you fond of jewellery?" he asked, as she raised her hands to unfasten the necklace.

"Do you know a woman who is not?" she said, having handed the diamonds to Mrs. Christopherson, who was still discussing their beauty with Maurice and Helen.

"To tell you the truth," answered Barbrook, "I know very few women."

"I thought you knew everybody," said Patty.

"That depends on what you mean by knowing. I see a good many young ladies, but as to understanding them, why, I don't in the least."

"I should have thought you were an excellent judge of character," she said.

"Why?" he asked, beginning to feel much more at ease.

"I imagine it is one of the chief conditions of success in life," she rejoined.

"You're right there," said Barbrook, grati-

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fied that anyone in this house should venture to hint at the fact that he had been successful. As a rule, there seemed a general agreement to ignore the circumstances of which he felt proudest. "I flatter myself," he continued, "I am a fair judge of men." And at this point Mrs. Christopherson interrupted him.

## CHAPTER VIII

Three-quarters of an hour before dinner Patty tapped at Helen's bedroom door, and found her cousin dressing with an air of complete dejection.

Helen turned towards Patty with a despairing gesture.

"I can never go through with this," she exclaimed. "I feel such a hypocrite."

"No reasonable person can accuse you of hypocrisy so far, dear."

"He thinks I intend to marry him," said Helen.

"He will soon begin to doubt the fact if you go on as you have begun," Patty retorted.

"How I wish you hadn't advised me to give way!" Helen murmured. "I can't tell you what I felt when he gave me the diamonds. I knew I ought not to accept them, yet I had

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promised my mother. Oh," she cried, "I wish I had followed Maurice's advice!"

"It, no doubt, had the charm of disinterestedness," quoth Patty.

"That is all nonsense," said Helen, flushing. "Just the result of your imagination. If you—if you were right—well, Maurice would not have been invited to Elderstrand."

"If Auntie had dreamed I was right, you mean," Patty insisted. "But she is very shrewd about some things and quite blind to others."

With that Patty left the room and returned to her own. Her wardrobe was too limited in extent to cause any difficulties of selection. When she had hinted at its deficiencies as a reason against coming to Elderstrand, Mrs. Christopherson replied with agreeable candour that it did not matter in the least what Patty wore. Since her arrival Mrs. Christopherson had hunted out an old dress of Helen's, suggesting that Patty should remodel it for her own use. The offer was declined without thanks, for Patty had never yet received a favour at her aunt's hands. Instead, Patty had

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made some alteration to the neck of her best black frock, and in this she met Mr. Barbrook's eyes this evening with quite satisfactory results.

Mrs. Christopherson was pleased to see that Josiah showed no signs of dissatisfaction in consequence of his cold reception, which nobody deplored more than his hostess. He talked across the table to Patty, who, for a commonplace young woman, shone rather brilliantly.

"It is a lovely evening," said Mrs. Christopherson, just before she left the table, "and if you like to smoke in the garden, Helen and Patty may care to join you."

Ten minutes later she stood at the drawing-room window as the two girls stepped out towards the men. Having seen the four united on the lawn, Mrs. Christopherson sat down on the sofa and took up a novel.

"Rather jolly to go to the cliff," suggested Maurice.

"Mr. Barbrook hasn't been to the sea yet," said Patty.

Helen seized her opportunity.



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"Suppose you show him the way," she cried, and without demur Josiah accompanied Miss Winter round the side of the house. After lingering behind a few minutes, with a glance at her mother in the illuminated drawing-room, quite engrossed by her story, Helen followed the pair, walking by way of the maze-like alleys to the green door which opened on to the cliff.

It was barely dark. A fresh breeze fanned their faces, and the sea lay below with a broad band of moonlight across its surface.

"It is in a solemn mood to-night," said Helen, as they stood on the edge of the cliff. "One feels as if one were in a church; a laugh would be a desecration. Look at the sky," she said, raising her eyes. "It is light as day."

But Maurice's eyes were on her face. Either it had changed or he regarded it differently. Her manner, too, seemed to have undergone some alteration, unless this also was due to his own point of view. A touch of emotion had been added.

"I prefer sublunary objects," he said.

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"How delightful to live here always!"  
Helen murmured.

"The mood doesn't last."

"I never wish to see London again."

"Until next season," he suggested.

"Oh, how miserably prosaic you are," she cried, turning away, only half-pleased at his refusal to take her seriously. For at this period Helen took herself very seriously indeed. This was partly the result of ten days' intercourse with Patty, though Helen had outstripped her teacher. What was but a commonplace to her cousin was quite fresh to her—as if a man of the world were introducing a youth to a certain phase of life.

"If I once let myself go," said Maurice,  
"I can't tell where I should stop."

"You haven't a particle of romance in your nature," she returned. "You only think of cutting up persons' bodies. You are a miserable materialist. If ever you marry——"  
She stopped, affrighted at her own temerity.

"Well, if ever I marry, Nell?"

"I suppose you will marry some day," she said.

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"Not much prospect of it at present, is there?" he retorted.

"I suppose," she said tentatively, "it would upset all your plans?"

"Of course I should have to cut the hospital."

"You would not like that. It would be an immense disappointment," she suggested, considering herself safe since he could not possess a key to her motive.

"A new departure, anyhow," said Maurice. "It's true I am only a hanger-on at present, but I fancy there will be an opening before very long."

"And then?"

"After years of plodding I should work my way up. But our staff is a very young one," he added, with a smile.

"And some day you will become a famous surgeon."

"Possibly," he admitted.

"And earn a lot of money," she suggested.

"I don't know that I care very much about that."

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"Then what is it you care for—fame?" she asked.

"Perhaps it is."

"What is fame, Maurice, that you can look forward to waiting and working for it for years and years, and going without ever so many things that everybody likes?"

Maurice laughed a little perplexedly.

"I don't quite know," he said. "I'm not given much to introspection."

"But what do you feel that you are aiming at?"

"You see, Nell, there's a small group of men at the top of the tree. Their names are in everybody's mouth; men of light and leading."

"You want to be one of them?" she said.

"Why, yes. It may be a vain ambition. Anyhow, be sure of one thing, I shall have to do something to get there."

"You think you can?"

"Yes, I think so," he said quietly.

"But if you were to leave the hospital," she suggested.

"I should buy a general practice and join the ruck."

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"What a fall was there!" she exclaimed.

"There might be a compensation."

"Oh, but could there be a sufficient compensation?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Only one," he said, "and perhaps it is too late for that."

After a short silence she said:

"I know what you ought to do, Maurice."

"Well?"

"To marry a rich woman," she returned.

"Then you need not leave the hospital."

"Certainly not."

"I don't see why you shouldn't," she insisted.

"I suppose you don't, Nell."

"That is mean of you!" she exclaimed.

"Not at all. Besides, you are by way of being wise in time."

"Suppose I were not what you call wise, after all," she said, watching his face.

"Then," he answered, resting a hand momentarily on her arm, "for God's sake remain foolish to the end."

"You think I am hatefully mercenary," she said.

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"There are spots on the sun," he cried with a laugh. "They are said to create a lot of disturbance on our planet, but we bask in the warmth all the same. Besides, I'm not sure I should like you to be different," he added.

"But if I were better?"

"You wouldn't be quite yourself. I think you'll do as you are."

"I wonder where Patty has got to," exclaimed Helen, approaching the garden door.

Patty, in the meantime, had taken a different path. Barbrook, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, a large cigar projecting from one corner of his mouth, walked silently by her side.

"I suppose they will overtake us," said Patty. "Helen is sure to go to the cliff."

"This does well enough for me," answered Barbrook contentedly. "Suppose we stay where we are."

Patty offering no objection, they walked in and out amongst the alleys for another few minutes without speaking. Then Barbrook, with startling abruptness, said:

"You know, I think you are honest."

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"Oh, we are all honourable men," she said, laughing. He looked at her a little at a loss.

"I don't know so much about that," he rejoined. "I can't get at them somehow. They put you off with a laugh or a joke, and I'm afraid I'm not good at that sort of thing."

"Has anyone been putting you off with a laugh or a joke to-night?" she asked.

"Well, no, I can't say they have," he said ruefully. "But I'm spoiling your evening," he added. "The fact is, I want a good growl."

"I know that feeling," said Patty. "What about?" she asked.

"Things in general."

"Surely you ought to be satisfied with the world," she hinted.

"Yes, that's true enough," Josiah admitted. "I ought to be satisfied, and I am, come to that. If you knew my little history, you'd say so."

Talking to Patty his manner became quite different from what it had been indoors with Mrs. Christopherson; not that he regarded her with less respect than her aunt, to whose class, whatever her occupation, she seemed neces-

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sarily to belong. But she succeeded in setting him perfectly at ease. He needed only the slightest encouragement to talk about the most marvellous fact within his ken: the rise of Josiah Barbrook.

As far as women were concerned, there had been a gap between the days of his impecunious youth and his introduction to Mrs. Jardine. Patty was the first "young lady" who had taken the slightest interest in his intimate affairs. He ceased to attempt to improve his manners for her benefit. His voice became more natural and less stilted, his manner simple and direct. Whereas, Patty's standard of comparison was different from Helen's.

"Your history would be immensely interesting," she said.

"You're something less than honest now, you know," he retorted, looking down quickly into her face.

"No, indeed," she protested.

"You seem different from the rest of them," he said.

"Well—I am hardly one of them. I'm a quite inferior person."



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"You know better than that," said Barbrook. "You're not such a fool as to believe you are their inferior."

"They think me so, at all events."

"Oh, very likely. Not that I'm going to find fault," he said. "Come to that, they've treated me rather handsomely—the whole boiling of them. But, you see, if I hadn't made my pile they'd never have had any truck with me."

"It must have been immensely fascinating," she exclaimed.

"What?"

"Making your—your pile."

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "I shall never forget the day I had my first sovereign. I always look back to that as the best day of my life."

"How did you get it?" she asked.

He took his cigar from his mouth and looked for a few seconds at its glowing tip. Then he put it back and puffed once or twice. It wagged up and down as he spoke, obviously with keen zest.

"I wasn't more than fourteen," he said. "I sold things in the streets—never made

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such a profit since. I borrowed half a crown to start with. The wonder was any one would lend it to me. Few that I knew in those days had half-crowns to lend. That gave me my start, you see."

"A little one shall become a thousand," said Patty. "What did you do with your sovereign?" she asked.

"You're making me talk about myself," he answered.

"Do you mind?"

"You see, I'm not particularly used to it, and I don't want to be a bore to you. As far as I can make out, a bore is supposed to be about the worst thing on earth."

"He isn't a pleasant domestic animal," said Patty. "But I'm not bored now."

"Anyhow, there are things best not talked about," he continued. "I lived on next to nothing. That's the secret. I saved almost all I made, bought a truck, stocked it—everything I touched succeeded. I meant getting on, you see. That's how I felt. At seventeen I was flourishing—took a shop. Lord!" he exclaimed, "I'll never forget the day I saw

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my name up over the door—gold letters on a green ground.”

“It must seem very wonderful when you look back,” she said.

“It seems impossible sometimes. I dream I’m—that the old days are back again, you know. Sometimes I wish they were—almost.”

“Is the result disappointing?” Patty asked.

“I suppose,” he said, “it’s something like climbing a mountain. Not that I ever did climb one. You like the toil and sweat of it, but the top’s misty and you can’t see far. I’ve got a pot of money. I don’t say I’d like to be without it. A man can’t go back. It’s like this,” he said, taking his cigar stump from his lips. “I smoke fine cigars where I used to have a pipe. Well, I tell you, when I get home at night, I light a pipe of shag, and it seems the best thing in the day. I suppose my tastes always will be a bit low, you know.”

“In fact,” cried Patty, “you pine for fresh worlds to conquer.”

“Perhaps that’s it,” he said contentedly.

“There are plenty. You might go into Parliament,” she suggested.

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"I've a holy dread of making an ass of myself," he returned. "I'm afraid," Barbrook added, "I've got away from the subject I started with. I wanted to ask you about Helen."

"Oh, but——"

"Rather I didn't?" he said quickly.

"I can't discuss my cousin," she answered, quickening her pace. Patty turned sharply to the right, when a few yards brought her to the cliff door, which Helen and Maurice had re-entered only a few minutes earlier, approaching the house by another path. "We shall be expected to look at the sea," said Patty.

"All right," he answered.

"You don't feel moved," she cried, with a laugh, as he followed her to the brink of the cliff.

"Ought I to?"

"Of course."

"Do you know what I was thinking about?" he demanded.

"Something very poetical?"

"Poetry's a thing I can't endure," he said.

"It puzzles me that men can mess about

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with that sort of thing. No, I was wondering whether one of my steam colliers might be off here."

"If you feel like that, it's perfectly useless to stay here," Patty answered, with a laugh. "Besides, the others will have gone indoors."

They overtook Helen hovering about the kitchen garden, and Maurice fell back with Patty. So it happened that he reëntered the drawing-room a few moments before Barbrook, and Mrs. Christopherson seeing Josiah with her daughter, believed that this order had been maintained throughout their ramble.

## CHAPTER IX

After breakfast the next morning Barbrook wished to write some letters. He never forgot his business, his mind was always occupied with some fresh scheme to increase his fortune. A holiday in the fullest sense was and always would be impossible for him. In his life's devotion to work he had found little space for amusement, with the result that, now he might have taken leisure, it was difficult to obtain recreation.

Mrs. Christopherson placed the dining-room at his disposal after breakfast.

"I will take care you are not disturbed," she said amiably. "Now, when shall you be quite disengaged?"

"If you will allow me until eleven," he answered, and she left him alone until that hour struck.

"I want you to see my glass houses," she

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cried, bustling into the room. "I call them mine, but really I feel quite afraid of the head gardener. Maurice and Helen are waiting for us outside," she added, opening the window.

They all, with the exception of Patty, who was busily working at Helen's trousseau, walked round by the side of the house, to the vegetable garden, visiting the tomato houses and the vinery, where on such a hot morning no one cared to linger. Then they strolled along the paths, while Mrs. Christopherson called attention to the peculiarly fine dimensions of cabbages, turnips, and things of that kind.

Presently they drew near a youth who was pulling potatoes, whilst a man of about sixty years of age, wearing corduroy trousers, a sleeve waistcoat, and an old sealskin cap, a tallish man and thin, with a freshly coloured face and a sparse, fair, grizzled beard, stood in the path, superintending the operations of his subordinate. He was of the earth, earthy; a quantity of mould clung to his heavy boots and his brown, horny hands.

This was Mrs. Christopherson's pet aversion,

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Jones, the head gardener. She was slightly ahead of the others, and as Jones turned at her approach, Mrs. Christopherson experienced one of the greatest shocks of her life.

She rather prided herself on being as rigid of caste as a Hindu. Barbrook had crossed by a golden bridge, but she certainly regarded Jones as being fashioned of different clay from herself, and distinctly inferior.

Imagine her astonishment, then, her consternation, to see her guest, her daughter's *fiancé*, step quickly forward, and without a moment's hesitation grip the head gardener's hand. And Jones betrayed neither pride nor humility. He took Josiah's hand and clung to it.

"Who'd have thought of seeing you here!" cried Barbrook.

"Been 'ere the last five years," said Jones, "and 'ere I'm like to stay. The place suits me and I suit the place—in a general way," he added, with a glance at Mrs. Christopherson.

The two men stood talking for some minutes, whilst Mrs. Christopherson walked on.

"Well, I shall see you again," said Barbrook presently.



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"So long, Josey," answered Jones, and Josiah stepped away.

Already extremely antagonistic, Mrs. Christopherson would, no doubt, have taken an early opportunity to dismiss Jones had this consoling act been within her power. But the gardener was as firm a fixture as any item in the inventory.

"A humble acquaintance of yours," she remarked as Barbrook came to her side.

"I don't know whether you find him very humble," said Josiah, with a short laugh.

"No, indeed," she exclaimed with real feeling.

"If it wasn't for his pride—obstinacy I call it—he need not be here," said Barbrook.

"Ah, you would have been his benefactor," she cried, clutching at the prospect.

"As it happens, he's mine," said Barbrook.  
"He lent me the first half-crown I ever had."

"What a hot day it is, to be sure!" she remarked, shuddering slightly.

Maurice had fallen behind to look at an asparagus bed.

"An unrehearsed effect," he said. "You

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can imagine the feelings of one spectator. Don't you think the actors acquitted themselves rather well?"

"They succeeded in amusing you, at all events," she retorted.

"And you?" he asked.

"I felt scarcely interested," she said.

"I thought——"

"Oh, I know what you think," she answered. "We court Josiah for his money!" she continued, with unusual warmth. "And you are pleased to see us taken down a little. And—but," she broke off, "you are vastly mistaken, because I wouldn't—nothing would make the least difference to me, if I——"

"Yes," he said.

"You understand perfectly what I mean," she returned, "and we won't say any more about it."

Mrs. Christopherson, however, said a great deal more about it—to Patty.

"Really, it was most humiliating," she insisted, "and I shall never be able to look Jones in the face again. So perfectly familiar! If Helen mentions the subject to you, pray

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make as light of it as possible. Some of our greatest men have risen from the ranks. Look at Faraday and—I am always bad at recollecting names. Still," she added, "it was extremely provoking."

Helen, however, did not mention the subject to Patty, although Barbrook made an occasion to refer to it in the garden that afternoon.

"Rather odd," he said, "that I should run up against the very man I had been speaking to you about. I hadn't seen him for six or seven years. He's such an obstinate beggar, he would never let me do anything for him, and now he turns up here. It's a thing I'd sooner hadn't happened, you see; it isn't exactly that I'm ashamed——"

"There is nothing to be ashamed of," said Patty.

"I fancy you understand how I feel about it," he continued. "Somehow you've the knack of understanding a man. That Vaughan's not a bad sort of chap," he cried, rather abruptly.

"A very good sort of chap," she said warmly.

"Getting along pretty well?" he suggested.

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"I suppose you would say he's not getting along at all," she said. "He took a gold medal in surgery, but he hasn't anything definite to do."

"He talks as if he had a lot to do," rejoined Barbrook. "Some strange cases he was telling me about."

"Ghastly, but fascinating," she said, with a smile. "Most people like tales of that kind. I never know how many of Maurice's are true. It will be years before he makes much of an income."

"He's got money, then?"

"A little, but he has a close pinch."

"I shouldn't have thought that," said Josiah. "Rather inconvenient—if he wanted to get married, now. But perhaps he doesn't?" And Barbrook looked curiously into her face.

"It would be a case of Love *versus* Ambition," she answered.

"Now you would put love first?" he suggested.

"But you would not," she retorted.

For a few moments they strolled along the garden path in silence, then it chanced that

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their eyes met, and in Patty's Barbrook saw what carried him a little beyond his self-control.

"I was thinking," he said, bending over her, "of the treasure in store for some man one day."

The colour dyed her face, and silence fell upon them again.

"I want you to speak to me frankly," he continued presently. "I know you will if you say so."

"About Helen?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"If there's anything you wish to know about my cousin, why not ask herself?"

"That's what I made up my mind to do when you choked me off last night," he said. "But I've slept over it, and I thought I'd try you again. I can't understand these people," he said. "If a man goes to Rome, he tries to do as the Romans do. I try my best not to make a spectacle of myself, but, I tell you, I feel rather like a fish out of water."

"What has this to do with Helen?" Patty asked.

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"I gave her that confounded necklace," he explained. "I took pains to choose it, and I got Mrs. Jardine to help me. I hoped it would please her. My presents generally have pleased her."

"It was a thing to please any woman," said Patty.

"I thought so. But she wasn't pleased, anyhow. I'm not a very exacting man, but I like to see my way. When we parted in London she seemed all right—in her way, you understand. But since I came here—well, you see how I've been treated. I can't say I like it, and when I feel strongly about a thing, it generally gets itself out somehow. But," he added, "it seems to me there are people who'd rather cut their tongues out than show any feeling at all."

"Helen isn't one of those people, Mr. Barbrook."

"I fancied she was, you know," he said dryly.

"I have known her intimately all her life," Patty returned. "She's the dearest girl in the world, and her heart's as warm——"

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"She doesn't wear it on her sleeve," he exclaimed.

"Her impulsiveness is one of her charms."

"I haven't noticed it. I thought, perhaps, it might be considered the proper thing for a girl to treat her sweetheart as if she hadn't a scrap of interest in him," he said, evidently expecting an answer.

"I'm afraid I am not an authority," she said hesitatingly. "I suppose if one loved a man very deeply it would be difficult to appear indifferent if one tried."

"I never imagined Helen loved me deeply," he cried.

"She promised to be your wife."

"And at the time that was nearly all I cared about," he admitted. "I thought your cousin the most beautiful girl I had seen. I wasn't ass enough to suppose she loved me."

"Yet you—you wish to marry her," said Patty.

"You can't understand that?"

"Our points of view are different," she answered quietly.

"Well," he said, looking down at her face,

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"I'm not so sure about that. Only I want to do what's proper. Perhaps I've nothing to complain of. I'm not fond of complaining. If I don't like a thing, I try to alter it. If I can't alter it, I put up with it. If I'm being treated in the usual way, I don't so much mind; only, you see, it wasn't quite so bad in London."

Patty tried to turn it aside with a laugh.

"I know nothing about the manners and customs of society," she said. "I have never been to a dinner party or a dance in my life."

"You don't care for that sort of thing," he suggested sympathetically.

"Oh, very much; only they haven't come in my way. So, you see, I am the worst person in the world to advise you."

"I suppose if things don't alter," he said, "I shall have to ask what they mean. But that's what I'd rather not do. It might look as if I wanted to go back on my word."

"And—and you don't?" she asked.

"It's a thing I don't go in for," he said, a little curtly, as Patty fancied.



## CHAPTER X

After luncheon the next day Mrs. Christopherson suggested that her guests should spend the afternoon at Rookingham, which was at the height of its season. She offered the waggonette, but insisted they could walk more quickly by the cliff. They all set forth before three o'clock, and Mrs. Christopherson went to the drawing-room, intending to spend a pleasant afternoon with a novel; but soon her thoughts began to wander towards Helen.

Since the afternoon of Josiah's arrival, things appeared to be settling down. Although Helen avoided Barbrook as much as possible, she had found no fresh opportunity to affront him deliberately. On the whole, Mrs. Christopherson could hardly delude herself that Helen was beginning to change her mind again, but yet she tried to be hopeful. Her outlook was influenced more by the weather

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and the condition of her own health than by objective facts. The day was gloriously fine, and Mrs. Christopherson had never felt better in her life.

She had seldom looked handsomer. Her light drab dress clung to her figure, her eyes were clear and bright, and indeed it was difficult to realise she could be Helen's mother.

She had disposed herself comfortably, she was interested in her novel, when, at half-past three, the door opened and a servant announced:

"Sir Weston Saville."

About the last person she expected to see at Elderstrand.

Sir Weston Saville might be described as a "well-preserved" man of fifty. It was obvious that he still paid considerable attention to his personal appearance. He was remarkably well dressed: his boots, his spats, his knickerbockers were all exactly the correct thing. His creaseless drab jacket looked as if he had been melted and poured into it.

His hair, still thick, being extremely fair, his face round, his skin pink and white, gave

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him an infantile, almost cherubic, appearance, which was assisted by a chubby figure.

This, in fact, was the sorrow of his recent years. A man of low stature, he had always prided himself on the neatness of his figure. Now, unfortunately, he had none, and he attributed the defect to ill health. Concerning this adipose tendency, Sir Weston had consulted many eminent physicians, and if surgery would have helped him, he would have submitted without a pang.

As it was, his life had become a martyrdom. He had a hearty appetite, and could enjoy a glass of port, but he now ate sparingly and drank mineral waters. Whilst hating exercise, he walked miles every day, and had lately bought a bicycle.

He looked warm after his walk this sunny afternoon, and quite radiant with health. Closing her book, Mrs. Christopherson rose with an exclamation of pleased surprise, and met him with both hands extended. He retained them whilst he looked with undisguised admiration into her face.

Sir Weston Saville had been many years a

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widower, and his first marriage having proved a failure, he was naturally determined that there should be no mistake about a second venture.

To Helen her mother appeared a woman of middle age, matronly, often kind and indulgent, but frequently impatient and irritable. Patty regarded her aunt as an unsympathetic, egotistical person, who dressed a little youthfully. Barbrook stood in awe of a prospective mother-in-law. Maurice often admired Mrs. Christopherson and found her amusing, save when she endeavoured to control Helen's future. But Sir Weston Saville esteemed her the finest woman he knew; a cheerful, entertaining companion, and several years younger than himself. Sir Weston had always seen Mrs. Christopherson at her best. He had never had an opportunity of observing her under the stress of domestic perplexity. To-day he thought she looked even younger than when he last saw her in London three months ago.

"I thought you were mountaineering in Switzerland," she cried.

"I was until a fortnight ago," he answered.

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"My physician suggested mountain climbing, but I don't fancy it did me the least good."

"So you fall back on your native country."

"I am staying at Rookingham," he said.

"I am afraid this air will not agree with me. Far too bracing; the effect on one's appetite is enormous, and," he added deprecatingly, "the hotel has an excellent cook."

"What ever induced you to come to Rookingham?" she asked.

"Why, you," he answered.

"Sit down, and please don't talk nonsense," exclaimed Mrs. Christopherson. "Are you staying long?"

"That again depends on you," he said, taking a chair close to the sofa. "I have to congratulate you," he added.

"On Helen's engagement, you mean?"

"An excellent match, I hear."

All this was tantalizing to Mrs. Christopherson, but she put a cheerful face upon it.

"Helen is very fortunate," she answered.

"Mr. Barbrook is everything I could desire."

"I don't think I have met him," Sir Weston suggested.

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"The fact is," she said in a casual tone, "no one had heard of Josiah——"

"Heavens, what a dreadful name!"

"Until four or five months ago," she continued. "Then one began to meet him everywhere. He was certainly the great match of the season. There are immense possibilities—Parliament, a title, perhaps a peerage."

"They'll make any one a peer nowadays," said Sir Weston. "The wedding is likely to be soon?" he asked.

"I see no reason why there should be any delay," she answered cautiously. "Mr. Barbrook is staying with us; Maurice Vaughan and my niece also. I wonder you didn't meet them if you came by the cliff."

"I walked by the road."

"It is a mile longer."

"I always walk the longest way," he said. "You are looking your very best," Sir Weston added.

She flushed with pleasure. Young enough—if, indeed, a woman is ever too old—to appreciate a personal compliment, very few came in her way.

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"It is such a beautiful air," she murmured.

"I hope it induces a tractable disposition," he said.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Christopherson.

"I want to ask you a very great favour, the greatest in the world, Florence."

"Do you?" she asked, coquetting.

"I want you to be my wife, dear," and rising he came to her side.

Mrs. Christopherson was not in the least surprised. She had marvelled that he had not asked the important question a year or two ago. For she perceived that she attracted him, and on her own side, she liked Sir Weston Saville. She was by no means averse from becoming Lady Saville.

The reason why he had waited was not far to seek. For a long time his desire had been to marry Mrs. Christopherson. But whilst he wanted a wife, he shrank from the responsibility of a grown-up daughter.

This was a matter on which he felt very strongly; how strongly, in fact, might be gauged from his abstention until now. He was not fond of children; he had never pos-

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sessed any of his own, and he regarded them as unmitigated nuisances.

With Mrs. Christopherson he foresaw the prospect of happiness during his remaining years. She would be a pleasant companion on those travels which his health necessitated. But to receive Helen into his house, with all the inconveniences attending a girl of marriageable age, was more than he cared to put up with.

He had considered the matter, and determined to wait. He could not marry another woman, neither would he marry Mrs. Christopherson whilst Helen remained an encumbrance on her hands.

On his return to London, about a fortnight ago, he heard of Helen's engagement to Barbrook, whose career was no mystery. Sir Weston still hesitated. He thought a great deal about birth and little about money, of which he possessed plenty, however. Knowing something of Barbrook's antecedents, he formed an opinion of the man far from flattering, and for some days remained in a state of indecision.



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Finally he decided to go to Rookingham. After all, once Helen was married, he need not see much of her husband. So love proved triumphant, and Mrs. Christopherson now made him a happy man.

"I should like to make one condition," she said, a quarter of an hour later, when it might have seemed a day after the fair.

"I will agree to anything but delay," he promised.

"I prefer not to make our engagement public until I get rid of my guests," she said. "You see, there is so much of this kind of thing in the air at present."

"So that you will not keep me waiting when once Helen is married," he insisted, and in this regard she sent him away satisfied.

## CHAPTER XI

Mrs. Christopherson looked back to the event of the afternoon and forward into the future with equal satisfaction. She began to take a more hopeful view of Helen's affairs also. Her star was in the ascendant, and she could not contemplate defeat. And, although she had not the inkling of a suspicion of Saville's leading principle, she perceived that it was now more than ever desirable that Helen should marry. Her daughter would not contribute to the happiness of her new home.

The day after Sir Weston's visit, which she had referred to in the most casual manner last night, Mrs. Christopherson ordered the wagonette for half-past three, and suggested that Maurice should accompany Patty for a ride. It appeared that so many of Miss Parfitt's pupils brought bicycles to school that it became necessary for the governess to learn to ride.

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Helen's machine could be lowered to suit her cousin, and Maurice hardly saw his way to object.

Helen thought he was treating her rather shabbily, since she would be left at home with Josiah on her hands. Having seen her seated under the sycamore tree, and begged Maurice to have a nice long ride and on no account to hasten home, Mrs. Christopherson set forth to Rookingham, and meeting Sir Weston near the parade, by appointment, she alighted, and left the coachman for an hour to his own devices. She visited several shops, she went to the hotel for afternoon tea, and returned to Elderstrand in the highest spirits.

No sooner had she reached her own room than Helen followed her, with an expression which foreboded evil.

"Mother," she cried, "I am immensely sorry, but I can't bear it any longer."

"Bear what?" demanded Mrs. Christopherson, knowing very well.

"I shall speak to Josiah at once."

"Why have you changed your mind, Helen?"

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"Mr. Hodgson called this afternoon," was the answer.

Mr. Hodgson was the vicar, a man of pronounced evangelical tendencies, whose clerical life had been spent in small country places; he was forty years of age, simple-minded, narrow, earnest, and sincere.

"I don't see what Mr. Hodgson has to do with it," said Mrs. Christopherson.

"I introduced him to Josiah."

"Of course," said Mrs. Christopherson, taking a long steel pin out of her hat, and thrusting it into a cushion on her dressing-table with considerable energy.

"He thought it necessary to offer us both a great deal of advice; almost a sermon," Helen explained. "And then he asked us to pray with him."

"How extremely provincial!" cried Mrs. Christopherson. "What did Josiah say to that?" she asked.

"He only looked at me. Of course it was very embarrassing. But I didn't like to object, so we kneeled down and Mr. Hodgson prayed."

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"What a m̀ercy no one entered the room!" exclaimed her mother.

"I didn't think of that," said Helen. "Mr. Hodgson seemed very earnest. I shouldn't very much have objected if—but, mother," she cried with a good deal of feeling, "he prayed that we might live happily together."

"What execrable taste!"

"It wouldn't have been really if I—if—but I felt so utterly ashamed of myself. I was almost tempted to tell Josiah the truth at once—the moment Mr. Hodgson went away."

Mrs. Christopherson was prepared to admit that the situation had been a trying one. But the important thing now was to prevent Helen from acting impulsively while the recollection was fresh in her mind. Once more she beat down her indignation, and urged Helen to take time to think the matter over.

"There is no time to discuss the affair now," she said after having discussed it at great length. "At any rate, one day can't make any difference. We will talk about it again after breakfast to-morrow morning."

To this request Helen reluctantly yielded.

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But that to-morrow should see the end of this state of affairs she was quite determined. It was not that Barbrook caused her any actual unpleasantness; he left her, indeed, very much to herself. But she was not acting fairly towards him. She fully believed he had an affection for her, and she ought to disillusion him at once. The incident of the afternoon had caused her to take a more serious view of her duty, and she intended to fulfil it, for Josiah's sake more than her own.

That evening Mrs. Christopherson thought it injudicious to suggest that the men should smoke in the garden, and consequently they stayed some time together in the dining-room.

Barbrook lighted a large cigar, and, leaning back in his chair, began to question Maurice about his work at the hospital, a subject which Vaughan never showed any reluctance to discuss.

"It beats me," said Barbrook presently, "that you should be contented to do such a lot for nothing. You'll be a poor man all your life," he added, with the bluntness which Maurice was becoming accustomed to.

"No help for that," he answered.

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"The first question I always ask myself," said Barbrook, "is, Will a thing pay? If it won't I turn it up. You don't seem to trouble about that."

"I prefer a big fee to a little one," Maurice admitted. "But at present there's no question of a fee, little or big."

"That's what I set my face against. I must see a profit."

"Still, there's a good deal of work done in the world without a thought of gain," Maurice insisted.

"You can't do good work that's wanted nowadays without getting money for it," said Barbrook.

"Success is measured in money, then?"

"If you work well and your work's wanted, you get money; if not, you don't. Of course, if you choose to do what nobody wants done, it's a horse of another colour."

"It may be wanted later on," Maurice suggested. "A man makes a discovery that's useless in his own day; he dies in poverty and they put up a statue years afterwards. But then his reward is in his work."

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"I call that man a fool," said Barbrook. "I may feel a certain respect for him, but he's a fool all the same. Though," he added, "perhaps I oughtn't to say so to you."

"Oh, I don't mind," cried Maurice, with a laugh; "besides, it isn't quite my own case. I'm buying experience, but I expect a recompense—very much so. I'm not a man who despises money, only it doesn't enter into my calculations at the moment."

"It does into mine," said Josiah emphatically. "It always did, or I shouldn't be where I am to-day. But still," he continued, with one long arm stretched across the table, "I'm not such an ass that I can't see there are things you can't buy—a woman's love, for instance," he said, crimsoning like a girl.

"No, not her *love*," Maurice assented.

Rising from his chair, Barbrook began to pace back and forth the room, cigar in mouth.

"That's where your theory won't work," he said, stopping abruptly before Maurice.

"Where?"

"If you wanted to get married."



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"I shouldn't care to talk about it, you know," said Maurice.

"The fact is, Mrs. Christopherson's talked about it to me once or twice."

"About me?"

"You and Miss Winter," said Barbrook, thrusting his hands in his trousers pockets and staring down at Maurice's face.

"Most persons have their pet illusions," Maurice answered.

"Is that an illusion?"

"It isn't worth talking about," said Maurice, rising. "Especially," he added, looking straight at Josiah, "since the matter can't possess the least interest for you."

"Oh, I feel rather curious," Barbrook admitted.

"About my matrimonial intentions?" cried Maurice, with a laugh.

"I like to know what's going on about me. I'm so used to being boss of the show, you see, Vaughan."

"You're not boss of this show," said Maurice quietly.

"No, I don't feel a bit like it."

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“ Still, as Miss Winter’s name has cropped out,” Maurice continued, “ perhaps it is due to her that your—your curiosity should be satisfied.”

“ Well ? ” exclaimed Barbrook eagerly.

“ I have known Patty a good many years.”

“ So I understand.”

“ There’s no one I respect more highly, and I have as much idea of marrying her as she has of marrying me.”

Barbrook took the stump of his cigar from his mouth and placed it on a plate. He did not say anything, but, walking round the table, he took Maurice’s arm and led him towards the drawing-room.

## CHAPTER XII

Mrs. Christopherson came down-stairs to breakfast the following morning in a far from tranquil state of mind. It seemed extremely vexatious that all her plans should be spoilt by the whims and fancies of a wayward girl. During breakfast she animadverted against the four or five shops of which Elderstrand could boast, and declaring that it was necessary to drive to Rookingham for all one required, invited Maurice to accompany her thither at eleven o'clock.

When Barbrook stood waiting to be left alone to his letter writing and Patty had retired to the workroom, Mrs. Christopherson made a sign to her daughter, who at once left the room. Mrs. Christopherson went to her in the drawing-room a few minutes later.

"Now, what is this nonsense?" she exclaimed, shutting the door behind her.

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"It isn't nonsense, mother," answered Helen.

"An immense pity Mr. Hodgson did not mind his own business," said Mrs. Christopherson.

"I suppose he thinks that kind of thing is his business," Helen rejoined. "At all events, it didn't make any real difference. Because I told you from the first——"

"I remember perfectly well what you told me," cried Mrs. Christopherson, "but I had sufficient faith in human nature to believe you would think better of it."

Then at some length she went over the subject again, and as her manner stiffened, Helen also became more insistent. Now it came to the point, Mrs. Christopherson felt annoyingly impotent. It was obvious she could not compel Helen to marry the man.

"Well," she cried, throwing out her arms helplessly, "if you refuse to listen to reason, you must go your own way. I suppose I must speak to Josiah."

"To-day," urged Helen.

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"To-day or to-morrow," said her mother.  
"A few hours can make no difference."

"It must be to-day, please, mother."

"Really, Helen, you exhaust my patience," was the answer. "At least I thought I could depend upon your word. I will speak to Josiah to-night; but, understand me, I think you are behaving outrageously, and I shall never forgive you."

With that she swept out of the room, through the open window, and seeing Maurice smoking his matutinal pipe under the sycamore tree, Mrs. Christopherson sat down by his side. She poured her wrath into his ears, and was still inveighing against Helen and deploring her own impotence, when Sir Weston Saville entered the garden.

"You are an early visitor," Mrs. Christopherson exclaimed, her mood suddenly changing. "I think you know Mr. Vaughan," she added, and Sir Weston offered a hand to Maurice. "I wonder," she said, turning to Maurice, "whether you would mind bringing Mr. Barbrook."

Maurice went into the dining-room and told

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Barbrook who was waiting for him. Josiah always felt under a disadvantage in such circumstances. When Mrs. Christopherson formally introduced him, he would have paid a considerable sum for the ability to greet Sir Weston with the self-possession, to say the least, with which Saville greeted him.

He did not quite know whether he ought to shake hands or not, and, looking to Sir Weston for his cue, held his right hand out stiffly as if it was a semaphore; then, meeting with no response, drew it back in confusion.

"I have ordered the waggonette at eleven," said Mrs. Christopherson. "Maurice is going to drive into Rookingham with me, if you care to accompany us."

"Thanks, very much," he answered; and as Mrs. Christopherson went to prepare for the drive, stopping by the way to enlighten her niece concerning Helen's intractability, Sir Weston turned to Maurice, whilst Barbrook stood awkwardly by. "Though I didn't intend to drive back," he said; "the fact is, I am ordered to take exercise, and they tell me

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there's nothing like walking. I haven't been very well lately."

Maurice smiled as he looked at Sir Weston's fair, healthy face.

"Not much the matter, I hope," he suggested.

"I hope not, I hope not," said Sir Weston, pulling down his tightly buckled-in waistcoat; and ignoring Barbrook's presence, he began to enter into a detailed account of his symptoms.

Sir Weston was still engaged in this thoroughly enjoyable recital when Mrs. Christopherson joined them, and five minutes later the three were driven away.

Mrs. Christopherson seemed silent and pre-occupied, but Sir Weston's manner was such that Maurice determined to make an excuse to leave them at the earliest opportunity. Hinting at a desire to walk back along the cliff, he bade them good-bye on reaching Mrs. Christopherson's first shop, and when she had completed her purchases, Sir Weston induced her to stroll along the crowded parade.

He was a man who liked to display himself in crowds; he walked with somewhat of a

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strut, occasionally striking his legs with the short cane which he carried.

"Afraid you're rather bothered this morning," he said, finding Mrs. Christopherson unusually silent.

"Yes, I am," she admitted.

"You mustn't forget I have a right to your confidence, Florence."

She had no desire, although quite unsuspecting of the effect of such an announcement, to enlighten him concerning her domestic perplexities. She knew what was required of her, and preferred to appear as a cheerful, entertaining companion rather than as a woman with a grievance. But at the moment she was too full of her annoyance to resist the temptation to talk about it.

"You are sure to hear sooner or later," she rejoined. "The fact is, I am bothered about Helen. She declares she will not marry Mr. Barbrook."

Sir Weston turned towards Mrs. Christopherson with an expression of ludicrous astonishment on his cherubic face. Stopping on the parade, he rested his arms on the low stone



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parapet, staring down at the youthful builders on the sands.

Such an alarming contingency had not occurred to him. On hearing of Helen's engagement he regarded her as being entirely disposed of. He began to think he had acted too precipitately.

"Why on earth is that?" he demanded as Mrs. Christopherson sat down with her back to the sea.

"I cannot tell you," she answered. "Helen does not condescend to give reasons."

"There's no one else?"

"Certainly not," she answered, in a tone of intense conviction.

"If I were you I shouldn't encourage that kind of thing," he said.

"Encourage it!" she cried. "I certainly do not encourage it. But what am I to do?"

"You can do what you like with a girl of Helen's age."

"I wish you had my experience," she sighed.

"Twist her round your little finger," he insisted.

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"You can take a cow to the water," said Mrs. Christopherson, "but you can't make her drink. I have done everything in my power. She insists she won't marry the man, and I can't compel her."

"Then how do you propose to act?" he demanded.

"Exactly as she wishes," said Mrs. Christopherson. "That is the annoying part of it. I have had to give in. I must speak to him to-night. Now, isn't it annoying, Weston?"

"Infernally annoying," he agreed.

For it upset all his agreeable calculations. He had made up his mind that his own wedding should take place immediately after Helen's, and now he was determined that it should not precede hers. He was not, at his time of life and in his state of health, going to burden himself with a grown-up daughter. On the other hand, he was eager to make Mrs. Christopherson his wife, and, in fact, it was not easy to see how he could disentangle himself. He could not treat Florence discourteously, he shrank from disappointing either her or himself, but he did not waver for all that. He

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should never be fool enough to marry her whilst the girl remained on her hands.

In the meantime Helen was passing an intensely miserable morning. She began to cry as Mrs. Christopherson swept out of the drawing-room. It was not so much her mother's words—of course it was ridiculous to say she would never forgive her—but her manner and voice were lacerating. Helen did not move until the waggonette drove away, then going to her bedroom, she bathed her eyes and tried to remove all traces of tears. From her window she saw Josiah, looking bored to death, in the garden, and descending again, Helen went to Patty.

"Please come to help me," she entreated. "Josiah is alone, and there's such a long morning before us."

"And the prospect of such an evening!" cried Patty.

Her face, too, looked grave and showed no sign of a smile.

"I am immensely sorry for him," said Helen.

"That is delightful of you."

"Of course," Helen continued, "I know I

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have treated him horridly. I hate the idea of paining him."

"You—you fancy he will be pained?" asked Patty, looking up quickly.

"Come to help me entertain him," Helen urged. "He can't be left alone all the morning."

"You must make my peace with Auntie, then," said Patty, and laying down her work, she accompanied Helen round the side of the house. But on reaching the lawn there was no sign of Barbrook.

## CHAPTER XIII

Beginning to find the morning hanging heavily on his hands, Barbrook made his way to the kitchen garden in search of Jones.

He had not seen his old friend since that first morning, when, perhaps, he would have gone out of his way to avoid such a meeting.

For although he had always taken his own course regardless of what anybody might think of him until lately, amidst his newer social surroundings he was seldom quite free from self-consciousness.

In dealing with Colonel Jardine, for instance, as one of a board of directors, Barbrook could assume an air of masterful superiority. If Jardine ventured an impracticable suggestion, Josiah could, as he phrased it, sit upon him remorselessly.

But in Mrs. Jardine's drawing-room it was entirely different. He realised that on that

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ground he was the inferior. He had observed his host's behaviour for his own guidance, and their respective positions were reversed.

Whilst Barbrook would sooner have met Jones out of the range of Mrs. Christopherson's eyes, he nevertheless felt a genuine regard and a quite exaggerated sense of gratitude towards his former friend.

That half-a-crown had been at least the first link in a chain which led to fortune. Barbrook's palatial offices, his fleet of ships, his immense transactions, his vast capital had all been sequent to that timely loan.

In different circumstances he would have been delighted to see Jones again, to talk over those old, happy, strenuous days, and now it was, perhaps, a feeling of being affronted, neglected this morning which prompted him to seek out the head gardener and let Mrs. Christopherson think what she pleased about him.

"Well, hard at it," he cried, finding Jones, in fact, not so much hard at it himself, as taking care that his subordinates should waste no time.

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"You ain't been to see the missis yet," said Jones.

"How is she—all right?" asked Barbrook.

"She's all right; always is. Glad to see you, if you like to come. She often talks of you, the missis does. But, then, she says, only the other day, he don't trouble himself about the likes o' us."

Perhaps there was a shadow of truth in that. Assuredly Barbrook felt no strong desire to avail himself of Jones's hospitality, whilst, on the other hand, he disliked the contempt which he recognised in the gardener's tone.

"Don't be a damned fool!" he exclaimed.

"If you like me to come, I'll come."

"Have a bit o' supper with us," Jones suggested. "After all, you was glad enough once."

"When shall it be?" asked Barbrook, as his thoughts flew back to many a meal for which he had to thank Mrs. Jones.

"To-morrow suit you?"

"Eight o'clock," suggested Barbrook, naming Mrs. Christopherson's dinner hour.

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"We'll have a crack over old times," said Jones.

"Where is your place?" asked Josiah.

"Ask the old woman, she'll point it out to you," said Jones, with a chuckle, and Barbrook turned away, already beginning to dread the necessity of excusing himself for the occasion to his hostess.

Seeing no sign of Helen, he walked towards Patty's room, and believing himself unobserved, stopped a few yards from the open window. The sunlight fell across her hands and the white material with which they were busy. Her neck was bent as she sewed placidly on, and Barbrook noticed an appearance of tranquillity, of domesticity, which strongly appealed to him. Though he had stepped aside at Mrs. Jardine's insistence, his tastes were decided, and he could not change them at his time of life. He had never, indeed, attempted to indulge them, but since his arrival at Elderstrand he grew conscious of a desperate hunger.

Patty looked up with a smile as he drew nearer.



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"Are you looking for Helen?" she asked.

"Trying to kill time," he said, "and it dies hard. May I come in out of the sun? What are you making?" he asked, sitting down opposite the sewing-machine.

"You ought to be interested in it," she said.

"How is that?"

"It is a portion of Helen's trousseau," she answered.

Barbrook stroked his short beard and stared hard at Patty's hands.

"Hadn't you better try to find her," Patty suggested after a short silence. "Too bad to leave her to spend the morning alone."

"The same fate as yours."

"But, you see, I'm used to that sort of thing. Besides," she added, "I am paid for it."

"For that?" he said, indicating her work by a nod.

"I always accept a holiday engagement," she explained. "And as my aunt wanted me, I came for my board and lodging. So I am bound to make myself useful."

"You are one of those women who can't

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help being useful to someone," he retorted;  
"and little you get for it."

"How do you know that?"

"You can't even spend your holidays as you like."

"I like to spend them here," she said.

"You see," she continued, "I am a very unambitious person."

"Now I should like to hear the sort of life you lead," he said, leaning forward towards her.

"Well," she answered, pressing her work down on her knees, "we breakfast at eight, and after breakfast we go out, twenty girls in pairs, with me behind. There's usually a dispute to decide who shall walk with me."

"Naturally."

"We begin school at half-past nine."

"What do you teach?" he asked.

"I'm jack of all trades, master of none, I'm afraid. I teach a lot of English, a little Latin, more French. I take the junior class for music and drawing. We go out for another walk at half-past twelve, we dine at half-past one, begin afternoon school at three; then there are

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games and preparation in the evening, and bed at ten—generally a little tired.”

“ I should think so,” he exclaimed, “ though you’re not worn out by excitement.”

“ No,” she said, smoothing out her work, “ it isn’t exciting, but still it’s interesting. I daresay it’s as interesting as Helen’s daily round, for instance. Perhaps even as yours.”

“ I expect to find myself better off each week though.”

“ I don’t know that I care about that,” she answered. “ Of course, I often see things I should like to be able to buy.”

“ It would be an immense privilege to supply them,” he said.

“ But then,” she cried, meeting his eyes rather provokingly, he fancied, “ I daresay you don’t get everything you wish for.”

“ I generally try.”

“ Oh, but don’t you ever want things that money can’t provide ?” she asked.

“ Yes, that’s true,” he said, rising.

After a short silence Patty began to sew again.

“ You—you said something about asking Helen for an explanation,” she suggested.

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"Yes, I did."

"You have changed your mind?" she asked, thinking of what was in store for him.

"Well, yes. You see, I can't be sure what would be the result. It might lead to my departure."

"You don't wish to leave Elderstrand?" she asked.

"Not a bit of it. I want to stay."

"I didn't think you were so changeable," she said, sewing very quickly.

"I'm not changeable, in a general way," he answered. "When I make up my mind, I generally stick to it. But supposing you've got to choose anything; a ring, for instance. The chap shows you a tray of all sorts: diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and all the rest. Well, you fix on a diamond. You like it better than any you've seen. You ask the price, and you buy it. Then you catch sight of one you hadn't noticed before—a pearl, say; it's unpretentious, it mayn't sparkle so brilliantly as the diamond you've chosen, but you feel it's a thing you'd like to wear."

"But you—you've bought the diamond,"

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she exclaimed. "So you turn your eyes from its rival and put the first on your finger."

"Whatever you do, you can't call that changing," he insisted. "Anyhow, I'm not sure I am doing a wise thing. I feel I'm running a risk. Now," he said, "let me persuade you to come into the garden. I fancy your work will be done as soon as it's wanted."

## CHAPTER XIV

Maurice strolled back to Elderstrand slowly along the edge of the cliff, intending to return to the house through the garden. On nearing the green door, he stood on the edge of the cliff, looking down at Helen's tent. In front of it her chair was placed, and on the chance of finding her there he quickly descended to the sands.

"Alone?" he exclaimed, as she peeped forth through the opening of the tent.

"I felt I must be," she answered, coming out. "Isn't the sea glorious this morning? There's no more wind than yesterday, and yet it's face is quite different."

"You see, it happens to be against the tide, so naturally it looks rougher."

"That's human, isn't it?" she said, sitting down.

"So you have raised the standard of revolt again," he remarked.

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"Did my mother tell you why?"

"Yes; it was an awkward situation," he said.

Helen stared gravely in front of her.

"It made me feel wicked," she answered.

"After all, I was the only one who wasn't sincere. Mr. Hodgson was earnest as a man could be, so was Josiah; but I felt like a hypocrite. I kneeled there whilst Mr. Hodgson prayed we might love each other always. It seemed like a tacit admission on my part; it is not fair to Josiah, and I won't let another night pass without his knowing the truth."

"I think you are quite right there," said Maurice; "at the same time you need not trouble yourself about Barbrook's feelings."

She turned quickly to face him.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Now, I wonder whether you will really be pleased."

"If you cease to speak in riddles."

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "Barbrook is not quite so keen for the chase."

"With me for his quarry!" cried Helen.

"I had a suggestive talk with him last night, Nell."

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"About me?" she asked, lifting her eyebrows.

"Indirectly. He seemed quite curious concerning my own matrimonial intentions."

"Snakes in Ireland!" she retorted, still without a smile.

"He seemed to think my chief object in life was to marry Patty."

"What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?" Helen exclaimed.

"Anyhow, he seemed rather interested," Maurice insisted, "and I was pleased to be able to relieve his mind. He appeared very delighted——"

"Why should Josiah be delighted?" she demanded.

"You can draw your own conclusions."

"What are yours, Maurice?"

"Perhaps they will not gratify you," he said.

"You imagine that Josiah is—is attracted by Patty," she suggested.

"Does it sound very improbable?"

"Well—he is engaged to me," she said, with a short laugh.



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"I had more than a suspicion you would be jealous," he cried.

"I am not jealous," she insisted.

"What do you call it then?"

"You have simply taken my breath away," she returned. "I am completely astonished. Nothing ever surprised me so thoroughly before. I can't take it in."

"Well, I was surprised, too," Maurice admitted.

"Surely Patty doesn't—she would never marry him!"

"I don't see why she shouldn't," he said.

"I rather think she might. She has always stood up for the fellow; they've been thrown a good deal together here."

"Oh, but no woman could really——"

"You see, Nell, one man's meat is another's poison."

"What a splendid thing it would be for her!" cried Helen, still gazing seawards.

"That sounds very much like your mother," Maurice retorted. "Of course," he said, "the notion hardly occurred to me until last night."

"You had entertained a suspicion, then?"

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"I couldn't understand what possessed her to advise you to let him stay here," said Maurice.

"Patty may be a deep little schemer——"

"I can't believe that," said Helen.

"Or she may be languishing for love of the fellow."

"That's even more impossible," she exclaimed.

"She may be plotting for his money's sake——"

"No one is less mercenary than Patty," Helen insisted.

"Or manœuvring to win his young affections."

"Why should she be manœuvring at all?" Helen demanded.

"Now that light and guidance are vouchsafed to me," said Maurice, "the whole thing seems quite plain. Patty had been assured you would have none of him."

"Of course."

"So I imagine she saw no harm in playing for her own hand. I haven't the slightest doubt," he said, "that she stands a chance of winning the game. From her point of view,

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of course, it's a pity he will have to go away to-morrow."

"Not from mine," she answered, rising.

"No," said Maurice, as he carried the chair into the tent; "you are doing what you ought to have done the first day he came."

She walked up the path to the top of the cliff, scarcely speaking. Her face wore a thoughtful expression as she hastened along the garden path, reaching the house only a few minutes before the waggonette arrived with Mrs. Christopherson.

For Mrs. Christopherson an immense surprise was in store. She had experienced many surprises in the course of her life, but nothing quite so startling as this.

Nothing happened to prepare her. Luncheon passed without the slightest unusual incident, her guests went their several ways when the meal ended, and sitting alone in the drawing-room, Mrs. Christopherson tried to compose her mind in order to prepare for the evening's interview with Barbrook.

She really felt a good deal of sympathy for Josiah, if only on account of her wrath with

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Helen. He was undoubtedly very much in love with her daughter, and he was by way of being badly treated. Still there seemed no help for it. All that a woman could do Mrs. Christopherson had done, and it only remained to let him down as lightly as the circumstances permitted.

In the midst of these reflections the door began to open, tentatively, as if someone lacked courage to make a bold and abrupt entry. Helen came in, looking her very best, a fact which in some way heightened her misdemeanour. As she crossed the room Mrs. Christopherson regarded her with distinct antagonism.

Helen's manner was unwontedly embarrassed; her colour swiftly came and went, she appeared to be unable at first to find words, and when at last they got themselves uttered, the voice sounded unlike her own.

"Mother," she began, "I want to tell you——"

"There is only one thing I desire to hear," said Mrs. Christopherson austere, "and that is that you have returned to your senses."

"It is true I—I have changed my mind,"

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Helen continued, and Mrs. Christopherson started to her feet.

"My dearest girl," she exclaimed, and seized her daughter's hands.

"Please don't misunderstand me," Helen insisted. "I shall never marry him. Nothing will induce me to think of that. But I—I hate to displease you, and if you prefer that I should go on as we are for another week or two, I will do so."

Mrs. Christopherson was too judicious to inquire what had led to this fresh and sudden change of front. She would dearly have liked to know, but it seemed wiser to accept the good the gods provided without question. She kissed Helen effusively, she declared her daughter was a dear, sweet girl, and she felt thankful for a small mercy.

For nothing could be plainer than the fact that Helen was, above all things, fickle. True, she still persisted she would not marry Josiah, but when it came to the point, Mrs. Christopherson hoped that Helen would give way again as she had done so often already.

She went in search of Patty, eager to com-

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municate her good news; but failing to find her niece, she turned to Maurice, whose astonishment quite equalled her own.

“What has happened to influence her?” he asked, standing beneath the sycamore tree.

“I don’t know; for that matter,” Mrs. Christopherson rejoined, “I really do not care. She has given in to my wishes once more, and I have not the slightest doubt, when the time comes, she will give in altogether.”

Would Helen give in altogether when the time came? How many times had she declared she would do nothing of the kind? Yet only an hour or two ago she had vowed that Barbrook should be spoken to before the day ended.

Maurice did not waste much time over speculations about Helen’s motive. Being a practical young man, he went in search of her, making the tour of the grounds without success. But on his way back to the lawn he raised his eyes to her bedroom window, and there saw her face framed by white curtains.

“Won’t you come down?” he cried, stopping beneath the window.

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"What for?" she asked.

"I want to speak to you."

"What about?"

"You shall hear when we are on a level," said Maurice.

"Unless it's something pleasant I won't come," she returned, but came all the same. Her smile faded at the sight of his graver face.

"Another change of front," he said, as they walked along one of the alleys.

"The very last," she answered.

"What is the explanation, Nell?"

"I should have thought you would see," she returned.

"Afraid I don't. I'm entirely in the dark."

"After the light you gave me—about Patty, you know," she added rather impatiently.

"What has Patty to do with it?" he asked.

"You can understand I want to please my mother if it's possible," she explained. "She was very, very angry this morning. I don't think she ever spoke to me quite so bitterly. I felt very wretched about it, and when you

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told me about Josiah and Patty—you see, Maurice, if you are right, and I really think you must be, I have only to wait, and everybody will be satisfied.”

“ Mrs. Christopherson, for instance,” he suggested.

“ Poor mother!” cried Helen. “ But I saw it was the wisest course. As long as I thought he wanted to marry me it was different; but now you have made me believe he doesn’t—I don’t care for anything.”

“ You have made a mistake, Nell.”

“ How?” she demanded.

“ Mrs. Christopherson believes you are merely fickle. You have changed your mind again. When it came to the point, you drew back. How can she imagine you are in earnest?”

“ Silly!” she cried. “ How does it matter whether I am in earnest or not if Josiah prefers Patty to me?” and she ran on towards the house.

Although Helen had found Mrs. Christopherson’s anger very hard to bear, her mother’s obvious approval seemed almost more



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intolerable. At dinner Mrs. Christopherson was aggressively high-spirited, though an hour afterwards she found fresh reason for dissatisfaction.

Entirely unconscious of what had been so nearly happening, Barbrook could forget neither his promise to visit Mrs. Jones to-morrow, nor the necessity to excuse himself to his hostess. He always went a little in awe of her, and now began to regret his readiness to prove accommodating to the gardener.

"I have a favour to ask," he said, coming to Mrs. Christopherson's side. "I want you to excuse me to-morrow evening. I have promised to dine with Jones."

"Does Jones dine?" she exclaimed.

"To sup with him and his wife," said Josiah. "As a youngster I used to be very pleased to partake of their hospitality, and it was a kindness to invite me in those days."

"Other times, other manners," she suggested.

"After all," he rejoined, "certain manners apply to all times."

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"Quite true," she said, amiably, though she did not feel very amiably disposed towards Jones. "I can only admire your behaviour in a difficult situation."

On the whole, he thought he had managed rather well, and the rest of the evening passed agreeably. At eleven o'clock they all retired, but before Patty had begun to undress, Helen came to her room.

"Why does one always feel so wide awake at bedtime?" she exclaimed.

"Natural perversity," said Patty.

Helen sat down on the bed, clasping her hands round one knee.

"I think things are rather perverse," she said.

"How beautifully that blue dressing-gown suits you!" cried Patty, and Helen admired the effect in the looking-glass opposite.

"You and Josiah had a long talk this morning," she remarked in a casual tone. "He never seems to know what to say to me. What ever do you find to talk about?"

"He can't discuss you to your face, you see," said Patty.

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"So he confides in you. I am not surprised at that. Were you ever anything but cheerful in your life, Patty?"

Patty laughed gaily.

"I have my dull times," she said, "and then they're very dull."

"Now, if I were a man," Helen continued, "I know I should swear dreadfully. But you always find the soft answer."

"You found one for your mother this afternoon," Patty suggested.

"Ye-es," said Helen.

"How was it, dear?"

"Oh, I changed my mind," cried Helen, rising and going towards the door.

"Oh, yes; I'm not surprised at that. But why?" asked Patty.

"Patty," cried Helen abruptly, "I often wonder why you have never married."

"How can he cut it without a knife?" said Patty.

"But you must know some men; the professors, for instance."

"Such a collection, dear. You should see them. One of their qualifications for a girls'

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school is a general musti-fustiness. Besides, they're all married."

"That's fatal, of course," Helen admitted.

"You are trying to avoid my question," said Patty quietly. "Why did you change your mind?"

Helen leaned forward to kiss her.

"I followed your advice, anyhow," she said, "and I don't think you will have any reason to complain."

Patty stared at the door contemplatively some time after Helen had left the room.

## CHAPTER XV

Though sixty years or more had passed over Mrs. Jones's head, she was still an active woman, and her small abode was as clean as the proverbial new pin.

During a long and frugal married life she had gathered together a quantity of excellent old furniture, so that the interior of the cottage, hard by Mrs. Christopherson's gate, looked quaintly picturesque.

There was a substantial oak table, almost black with age, picked up years ago for a song; a coffer which afforded sitting space for three persons, a pair of comfortable arm-chairs. The floor was bare, because Jones was what she called a muddy man. A jarring element was the collection of half a dozen cheap German prints, and of these Mrs. Jones felt prouder, perhaps, than of all her other possessions.

There were books, too; an old Bible, con-

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taining the names of her children and the dates of their births and marriages in Jones's scrawling hand; one death, alas! also. And there were some numbers of the "Gardener's Chronicle" as well as a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress." Although Jones had come into contact with Barbrook on two or three occasions, Mrs. Jones had not seen him since the opening of his first small shop, when he was a youth of seventeen. Soon after that auspicious event Jones had obtained a situation in the country, whilst Barbrook speedily outgrew his old friends.

But the good woman's thoughts travelled far back to days when a lanky, bright-faced boy had often sat at her board, bringing an immense appetite with him. And, particularly, Mrs. Jones recollected one important occasion, she forgot what it was intended to celebrate, when he had done justice to a dish of fried sausages and mashed potatoes.

Never doubting that his taste had remained constant amidst all the changes in his fortunes, Mrs. Jones determined to provide the same fare to-night, so that when Barbrook arrived,

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the air was redolent. There was no tiresome waiting. After a cordial greeting, and many protestations that Mrs. Jones would not have recognised him, which was scarcely to be wondered at in the circumstances, the smoking dishes were placed on the table. Josiah had been invited to sup, and sup he should forthwith.

He entered fully into the spirit of the modest entertainment. True, he had almost sneaked out of Mrs. Christopherson's house; but once at the cottage, he spared no effort to please his rough host and hostess.

After supper whiskey was produced, and Mrs. Jones sat between her husband and her guest, her hands clasped in her ample lap, twiddling her thumbs with vast contentment.

"Have a cigar?" suggested Barbrook, offering his case, but Jones filled his pipe stolidly out of a metal tobacco box. "Very well," said Barbrook, "then I'll have a pipe of yours."

"Now," said Jones, priding himself on the refusal of the cigar, "I lay I'm the only man you know as don't want anything out of you."

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"You're an independent old idiot," answered Barbrook, with a laugh.

"He is that," said Mrs. Jones, and they both joined in.

"Yes," continued Jones, "I'm independent, I am. I always was and I always will be. Give me a fair week's pay for a fair week's work and that's all I want."

"That's all right," said Barbrook.

"You think you're a cleverish chap," said Jones, holding his pipe in his hand, on account of a deficiency of teeth, "and so you are. I saw that years ago, afore anyone else. Lord, how times have changed since you was a small chap selling——"

"He don't want to hear nothing about that," cried Mrs. Jones apprehensively.

"I don't care a button what he wants to hear," said Jones. "I lay he don't often get the chance of hearing what's good for 'un. You've done something," Jones added, "but I doubt if I 'aven't beat you."

"How's that?" asked Barbrook.

"I've not lost a day's work these forty years. Look at me!" cried Jones, removing his pipe



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as if to afford his guest a better opportunity for inspection. "I've brought up a fam'ly—three living, one dead—and all doing fust class. Bob's been driving the same 'bus these fourteen year, but Jim's got more newer notions like. Jim's driving one of these 'ere cabs without horses; p'rhaps you've seen 'em."

"Then there's Ann," Mrs. Jones chimed in; "her husband's on the railroad. You never see such children!"

"It'll trouble you to beat that, anyhow," said Jones, "say what you like. Here we are, me and the old woman, good for another score years, please God. I ain't ashamed to look no man in the face; no," he added, with greater significance, "nor no woman neither."

"Well, I don't know that I am," exclaimed Barbrook, with a smile.

"P'rhaps not. Still," said Jones, "you cut what I call a awkward figure up there." He jerked a muddy thumb vaguely in the direction of the house. "You don't seem one of 'em, somehow. It's just as if I was to go and plant a cauliflower among the begonias. A cauliflower's a good thing in its way, nothing bet-

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ter; but, after all, it ain't right in a flower-bed."

"I suppose not," said Barbrook rather uncomfortably.

"Besides," Jones continued with evident relish, "you may be powerful clever at makin' money, but if you ask me, you're a darned fool over some things."

"How's that?"

"'Bout marrying now."

"Ah, you're all the same, come to that," said Mrs. Jones, with a large, benignant smile.

"I wasn't," her husband insisted. "I wasn't no fool over that more than anything else, was I, Josey?"

"Certainly not," said Barbrook; "but why am I a fool?"

"I don't know why. What's the use of asking me? Only you are. How old are you now?" Jones demanded.

"Forty-six."

"And you talk o' marrying a young maid of eighteen, if so old. Not that I've a word to say again her, except her mother. But,

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Lord, she is a caution. Old prickly, I call her."

"What's that for?" asked Barbrook.

"'Cause she's a thorn without a rose, see?" said Jones, "that's what she is, a thorn without a rose. Mind you, Miss Helen's a fine built young woman, and I'd go out o' my way any day just to see her walk. But she'll lead you a fine life, you see if she don't. If you must marry a young 'un, well, the other'd be the gal for my money."

Barbrook began to think that the conversation was taking too personal a turn, and as soon as an opportunity offered, he rose to bid Mrs. Jones good-bye. It seemed marvellous that the time had ever been when he had looked upon these people as his superiors, when their manners had not appeared coarse, and he used to assume his best behaviour in their presence.

Mrs. Christopherson might have derived a malicious satisfaction from the knowledge that Josiah was not spending an entirely comfortable evening. On the other hand, she would have deplored the fact that Jones was enjoying

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himself. But when Barbrook returned, soon after ten, she entirely ignored his recent absence, considerably to his relief.

At eleven o'clock the following morning Sir Weston arrived. He had stayed away the whole of yesterday, much troubled in his mind. He could not decide whether to speak frankly to Florence at once, or to let the present state of affairs continue, in spite of his fixed and unalterable determination not to take the irrevocable step whilst Helen remained on her mother's hands.

Last night, however, a happy thought occurred to him. Mrs. Christopherson, it is true, had insisted that Josiah had no rival in Helen's affections, but Sir Weston began to hope that this was a mistake. Therefore he mounted his bicycle and rode over to Elderstrand in higher spirits than he had enjoyed since he last saw Mrs. Christopherson.

"Barbrook has gone, then," he suggested, soon after he entered the drawing-room.

"Oh, dear, no!" cried Mrs. Christopherson. "He is writing letters in the dining-room. Such a busy man, you understand."

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"I understood you had promised Helen to dismiss the fellow."

"It wasn't necessary," she answered. "Helen is so changeable. She came of her own accord and begged me not to interfere."

"Ah, well, you did not require much persuasion," he said cheerfully.

As far as Sir Weston was concerned, Helen might marry whom she pleased, so that she married somebody, and that soon.

"By the bye," he remarked presently, "an idea occurred to me; there may be nothing in it. But there's young Vaughan, now."

"What about him?" asked Mrs. Christopherson, blissfully unsuspecting.

"A decentish sort of man; young, not bad-looking; in splendid condition, not an ounce of superfluous flesh on him; the sort of man a girl of Helen's age might take a fancy to, you know."

"My dear Weston," she exclaimed, "Helen has known Maurice since she was a baby."

"Still, she isn't a baby now, Florence."

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"No, indeed; I often wish she was. She looks on Maurice as a brother."

"He isn't her brother, though."

"Now, really," she said, "do you suppose I should have brought him here if there had been the remotest possibility of anything of that kind? I think I have too much judgment, Weston."

"The idea just occurred to me," he answered. "I thought I would mention it. Of course, I expected to hear that Barbrook had gone. Vaughan is in a fairly good position, I suppose."

"A good position!"

"Doing pretty well in his profession, you know."

"He is doing nothing," she answered. "And that makes your suggestion seem so ridiculous—I was going to say. I don't suppose his income is more than a hundred and fifty a year."

"Good heavens!" cried Sir Weston with complete contempt.

"You see," she said, "that anything of that kind is quite out of the question. Besides, I

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know Maurice so well. I have often wished that he and Patty might——”

“On a hundred and fifty a year!”

“Poor Patty is different from Helen,” said Mrs. Christopherson. “She is not in the least ambitious.”

“Well,” he rejoined, “I’m glad to hear Barbrook hasn’t gone. By the bye,” he added, rising, “how long do you propose to stay here, Florence?”

“Oh, another month or six weeks,” she answered. “We all like the place, and Maurice says it is extremely healthy.”

“It doesn’t suit me,” he insisted. “I gained two pounds and a half last week. I don’t know what will become of me if I go on like this,” and Sir Weston pulled down his waistcoat.

“You should have a few of my anxieties,” she said.

“Oh, come, you haven’t many anxieties,” he returned.

“Well,” she admitted, “I really hope that everything will go along smoothly now. I really do begin to hope that.”

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“ Yes, yes; get the girl married as soon as you can, Florence.”

“ That is what I intend.”

“ And then,” said Sir Weston, “ you mustn’t leave me out in the cold.”



## CHAPTER XVI

Although Mrs. Christopherson had been inclined to ridicule Sir Weston's suggestion, it recurred to her mind after she was alone that night.

But no, she could not bring herself to believe there was the slightest ground for it.

If Helen's revolt had occurred after Maurice's arrival at Elderstrand, she might have become suspicious; but Maurice had been almost a stranger of late. When he called in Grandison Street during the season, Helen had been frequently out, and he had been invited to Elderstrand simply because it seemed desirable to have another man besides Josiah.

Prone to suspicion though she was, Mrs. Christopherson could not believe anything of that kind, especially, too, in the face of Maurice's protestations that he did not intend to leave the hospital.

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Nevertheless, she determined to keep her eyes open. She would keep a watch upon Maurice, and if she saw the least reason to be dissatisfied, Mrs. Christopherson would know how to act.

As the next few days passed, however, she grew quite convinced that Sir Weston had found a mare's-nest. It is true that Helen appeared to be on the best of terms with Maurice, as she had been for many years. But since that afternoon when, of her own accord, she surrendered for the second time, she had also appeared to be on excellent terms with Josiah himself. She no longer seized every opportunity to avoid him. They were frequently together, and Helen's manner appeared to have undergone a complete change, much to the bewilderment of Maurice, Patty, and the person most intimately concerned.

So that Mrs. Christopherson was in high spirits. She had some excuse for believing that all things were working together for good.

As to Barbrook, she declared (to Patty) that she liked him better every day. Now and then, it is true, his opinions on social and po-

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litical topics betrayed unfortunate sympathies; sometimes a solecism almost caused her to blush; and occasionally, when she lamented the quality of certain articles in domestic use, he showed too intimate a knowledge of the subject; but, on the whole, he succeeded in gaining Mrs. Christopherson's approval.

Nothing could surpass Josiah's desire to make himself generally agreeable. For Maurice he appeared to conceive a sincere liking, and one evening he tried to prove his regard. The men were smoking after dinner, when Josiah began to talk about the difficulty of obtaining fair interest for one's capital. A little clumsily he led up to a personal inquiry.

"Now how is yours invested?" he asked.

"In Consols," said Maurice, knowing his man by this time too well to feel annoyed.

"I could double it for you in a few years," Barbrook suggested. "You see, Vaughan, I'm in the know. There's a company being floated just now. The shares will be at a high premium before the list closes. I can get a hundred five-pound shares allotted to you at

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par if you like. All you have to do is to sign a form of application—I've got one upstairs—and I will give you a cheque for the difference later on. You would have no trouble in the matter."

"Why not take the shares yourself?" asked Maurice.

"I shall take some. I can't take the whole boiling, but I can do a good turn for a friend."

"If I don't hand out any money," said Maurice, "and you give me a cheque, I might as well accept a present from you straight-away. It amounts to the same thing."

"Except that the money doesn't come out of my pocket," rejoined Barbrook. "There will be a scramble for the shares, the capital could be subscribed over and over again; it's simply that I'm in a position to obtain an allotment. You could sell the next week and pocket a good round sum."

He seemed very eager to do Maurice this good turn, but Maurice persisted in his refusal. He believed it was merely a plan to assist him, and he required no man's assistance, least of all Barbrook's. In this, however, Maurice

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was mistaken, since Josiah had told him precisely the truth.

“ You’re the only man I know who’d be so sensitive,” said Barbrook at last. “ It isn’t the only thing I could put you up to ; but some people won’t let a man do them a turn.”

He won Mrs. Christopherson’s approval in nothing more than his demeanour towards Patty, whom, of course, he must regard as a kind of poor relation.

She might have been a paid companion, and in a manner she was a paid companion. Patty anticipated every want. She fetched and carried, stitched and darned, played accompaniments, or, when her services were not required, she shut herself in the workroom with the sewing-machine and the cat.

Mrs. Christopherson, pitifully unsuspecting, admired Josiah’s efforts to set Patty at her ease. He liked to draw her out, always listening to her opinions, which were utterly worthless, since she had no experience of life, with a deference beyond praise. It was always Josiah who invited Patty to sing ; he even went as far as to say he preferred a contralto voice,

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although Helen's was a pure soprano. Whilst Helen, far from jealous, smiled at his preference, Mrs. Christopherson ascribed Josiah's behaviour to his inherent courtesy. Not only was her mind free from the slightest suspicion of her niece, but she began to fear lest Patty should be diverted from the work which was, after all, the cause of her presence at Elderstrand.

"Really, we have spent the most delightful ten days," she said, going to Patty's work-room one morning. "But I should just like to see how you are getting along. Josiah won't want to stay here for ever, and before he goes away I hope the day will be fixed."

"You think Helen will fix it?" asked Patty, showing her aunt the work.

"I can only hope, Patty. But I confess I do hope. Everything is turning out just as I prayed it might. You must see how very nicely dear Helen is behaving. There may be a little trouble when he comes to the point, but she has changed so often, I can't help thinking she will give way in the end. I thought I would give you a hint, Patty, and it might be

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as well if you did a little before breakfast these lovely mornings."

"Very well," said Patty, docile as usual, and Mrs. Christopherson stepped out into the garden, shading her eyes with her hand. An approving smile crossed her handsome face.

In one of the chairs beneath the sycamore tree Maurice sat, a pipe between his lips, a frown on his brow. The sun shone brightly, insects buzzed about him, and above their hum he could distinguish the rumbling sound of Patty's sewing-machine.

The tennis net was fixed, and on one side of it Helen, in a white frock, was giving instruction in the game to Barbrook on the other. He had removed his coat, but not his waistcoat, and Maurice's chief consolation was the ridiculous figure which Josiah cut.

"My dear Maurice," said Mrs. Christopherson, coming to his side, "how miserable you look. I am afraid you feel neglected, but really, everything seems so promising, I don't like to encourage Patty to neglect her work. That was rather a good stroke of Josiah's," she cried, as he chanced to hit the ball. "I hope,"

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she added, as he watched the game moodily, "you have nothing to worry about. Of course, I know you must have a close pinch, but you should try to look at the bright side of things. Well done!" she cried, clapping her plump hands, as Barbrook hit the ball again. "He seems to have taken a great liking for you, Maurice."

"Much obliged," said Maurice.

"It may prove an excellent thing for you," she continued, wishing well to all the world since fortune seemed to smile upon her. "He knows so many people, though I should imagine he is a man who would never be ill. It wouldn't surprise me," she added, "if he were to ask you to be his best man. He was talking about you last night. No doubt he wanted to say something pleasant, knowing you were a very old friend, but he considers you a little too independent to get on really well. Ah," she cried, beaming approval, as Helen stepped off the court, "they are going to the fruit trees."

Helen was rather fond of going to the fruit trees, and in her case Jones never offered the



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least remonstrance. She stopped beneath a greengage tree now, and Josiah held down a branch while she picked some fruit.

"Rather hard on Patty, to keep her indoors all the morning," she suggested.

"I think it is," said Barbrook.

Helen pressed her teeth into a ripe greengage.

"Don't you admire my cousin very much?" she asked.

"I can't imagine anyone failing to admire Miss Winter."

"Neither can I," said Helen. "Isn't it strange she has not married? Of course, she lives rather out of the world at Miss Parfitt's."

"I'm not sure that is a disadvantage," he rejoined.

"If I were a man," Helen persisted, "Patty is the kind of woman I should like to marry. There are some persons you admire very much, yet you never feel sure of them. Now Patty can always be depended upon. I think," said Helen, "I ought to go to look after my mother now. Suppose you make a call on Patty."

But Barbrook still stood by the greengage

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tree. He could not refrain from a comparison of the two girls. He saw the one—essentially a sweet, lovable woman; her pretty, slight figure; dark, sympathetic eyes; her rather homely dress—angel in the house, consummate companion for a man's fireside, perfect mother of his children. And he saw the other, bright, fascinating, tantalizing, superb in form, a woman to be proud of, capable of awakening his passion, and, strangely enough, of appealing to the worst in him. If he had not seen Patty at Elderstrand he might have felt as eager as ever to marry her cousin in spite of certain misgivings for the future. As it was, he knew which way his happiness lay, and his prospect seemed to depend on Helen rather than on Patty, for he could not understand her. He, like Mrs. Christopherson, was perplexed by her change of front. If she had continued to treat him as she had done during the first few days of his visit, his course would have been quite plain. And, indeed, his course was plain in any case, Barbrook not being the man to draw back from the bargain as long as he believed that Helen wished to stick to it.

## CHAPTER XVII

Going to the sycamore tree to seek her mother, Helen found Maurice reading the "British Medical Journal."

"Oh, put that away!" she exclaimed. "You ought to forget there's any such thing as disease or pain in the world."

Maurice dropped the journal on to the grass by his side.

"Live in a Fools' Paradise, in fact," he said.

"Isn't there a Paradise for wise men?" she retorted. "If you are a wise man. Anyhow, you're not such a nice one as you used to be. You looked the picture of misery half an hour ago."

"My mood depends on yours, Nell."

"Then, pray, don't frown any more," she insisted.

"You wouldn't like to sit here for ever," he suggested.

"Oh, I don't know. It is pleasant enough."

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"Mrs. Christopherson would summon you away, and you would obey."

"You think obedience is my strong point," she said.

"It remains to be proved."

"Now, what do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"Well, I have had the opportunity to observe you whilst I have been here, and you have always yielded to Mrs. Christopherson's wishes."

"I call that mean, Maurice. I acted on your advice."

"I protest against that."

"On your information, then," she said.

"I wish to heaven I had kept my own counsel!" he exclaimed.

"Why?" she asked, looking down at the grass. But Maurice did not answer. The fact was, he hated the idea of her being bound, however loosely, to Barbrook or to any other man.

"You wish you had not told me about Patty, then?" she asked.

"Why, of course."

"I wish you would tell me why," said Helen.

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"Mustn't," he answered. "Now, suppose I turn the tables? Suppose I begin to question you?"

He turned towards her, clasping his hands round his knee.

"What about?" she asked.

"Why did you decide to give Barbrook his dismissal in the first place?"

"Do you know, Maurice," she cried, flushing from brow to neck, "I can't understand Patty. Of course," Helen continued quickly, "I see you were right. I think I should have begun to suspect even if you had not thrown out a hint. I think she tried to influence me before Josiah arrived here."

"How did she set about it?" he asked.

"Oh—in one way and another. I am very glad—whatever may happen. But I feel sure she acted with a motive."

"Don't most people?"

"Yes, but with a motive different from what was apparent. She used to talk to me about—about love and marriage, and I thought——"

"That she was considering the subject in the abstract," he suggested.

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"I don't believe that now," she said, "and it seems to upset all my ideas about Patty. I would rather not believe——"

"Just for a handful of silver he left us," cried Maurice.

"Oh, I hope not," she answered. "And yet, how can she really care for him?"

"A pleasant way to speak of your *fiancé*!" Maurice suggested.

"But you understand why I permit that," she said, a little eagerly. "Now I am convinced he doesn't want to marry me, it is quite different. I feel I can treat him like an ordinary human being."

"It doesn't occur to you that he may be misled?" said Maurice. "Things will come to a deadlock. At first you showed him plainly what you felt. Now you have changed all that, and how is he to know the inner working of a woman's mind?"

"But if he likes Patty——"

"No doubt about that," Maurice insisted. "But a man can't always see his way to grasp what he likes."

"I suppose not," said Helen. "If you

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wished to make my mother happy, and to marry Patty yourself, for instance, you couldn't, could you?"

"I think it might be possible," he returned.

"Anyhow, you would not," she insisted.

He sat silent a few moments, asking himself whether he would or not. He did not attempt to disguise the fact that it would entail the sacrifice of what he held very dear. Then he looked full into Helen's eyes.

"Yes, I think I would," he said.

"And give up your career?"

"It would be a wrench," he answered; "but you are asking me to imagine myself—well, in love with Patty. For the woman he loves a man gives up everything. 'He finds in loss a gain to match,' you know, Nell."

"Ah, but she might not let him," said Helen quietly.

Maurice darted a quick glance at her face, which had become portentously solemn. She was certainly showing him a new phase of character.

"Why not?" he asked.

"I—I suppose she might—it is possible she

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might love him too well to accept such a sacrifice."

From the first day of his visit Helen had felt safe in his ignorance. Whilst he lacked the key, it seemed possible to play with her heart. But to-day she had been carried somewhat farther than usual, and love spoke in her eyes. She speculated concerning the birth of her love after the manner of a curious, but uninformed, child.

She was perplexed as to its inception. Had it been developing unknown to herself, and had she become merely conscious of it; had it quickened at the shock of Patty's annunciation of Maurice's? Because she had not thought thus of him before that day, although she almost wished she had done.

Why should Patty's statement, the truth of which Helen hardly felt certain of even yet, cause love to live in her own heart? Yet it seemed, almost unsatisfactorily, that this had been the case. Helen could not resist the conclusion that Patty had deliberately used Maurice as a means to turn her against Josiah, thus displaying the most marvellous cunning as



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well as knowledge. And yet good had come out of evil; Helen entertained no doubt about that.

And now her body seemed lightly to droop, her face was flushed, and for a moment there was that in her demeanour which might enlighten a judicious observer.

Now Mrs. Christopherson chanced to be standing at her bedroom window, and seeing the pair beneath the sycamore tree, she watched them as well as she could through the thick foliage.

Maurice leaned forward, resting a hand on Helen's chair.

"Nothing could be less like a sacrifice," he said, in little above a whisper.

"A moment ago you admitted it would be one," Helen retorted, and Mrs. Christopherson wished she could see her daughter's face more distinctly.

Maurice leaned nearer; Mrs. Christopherson saw that distinctly.

"Nothing in comparison to the infinite gain," he said.

Mrs. Christopherson stood at her bedroom

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window for some time after Helen had re-entered the house. It was the first time she had noticed the slightest thing to justify Sir Weston's suggestion, and even now she scarcely felt uncomfortable. After all, she knew what girls were; young men, too; and, in fact, Mrs. Christopherson's mind could not easily grasp the idea of such duplicity.

It was, perhaps, as well that she remained unaware of what was happening in another room of the house at that moment, where Patty sat demurely stitching, whilst Barbrook watched her hands.

"Then, on the whole," Patty was saying, "you are glad you did not leave us?"

"Very glad."

"In spite of the risk you hinted at?" she said.

"It doesn't do to think overmuch of the difficulties by the way, you know."

"Still, it is proverbially dangerous to underrate the strength of your enemy, Mr. Barbrook."

"Of your enemy—yes."

Patty looked up with a smile.

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"You are spoilt by success," she cried.  
"You can't admit the possibility of failure."

"I daresay you're right," he said solemnly.  
"A man has to pay the price for most things. Though, as to being spoilt, why, I wasn't of much account to begin with."

"Something—something fine must have been latent in you," she said, "to do what you did; to educate yourself, especially."

"You see, I could read and write before I was twelve," he explained; "that's the beginning of everything. If a lad can read—think of the world that's open to him. With the best will in the world, you can't work all night as well as all day, and I never wanted a great deal of sleep. Besides, I liked reading. As I got along and fell in with different sort of people, I realised my deficiencies. If I wanted to do anything, I was bound to remove them."

"Then you studied in order to get on?" she suggested. "It was not an end in itself?"

"You'd rather it had been?" he asked, leaning farther over the sewing-machine.

"I don't feel sure. Because I think one

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can't do better than to set himself a definite end—and reach it. I am not saying you might not have had a higher aim," Patty added.

These conversations were intensely enjoyable to Barbrook, who, as a rule, perceived that he was prohibited from talking of what he felt the proudest, since it entailed a reference to days best forgotten. But without always approving—Patty was never servile—she never failed to appear interested.

"That's right enough," Barbrook admitted; "and a very clever chap who borrowed twenty pounds of me spent an hour proving no one was any the better for all I'd done. He said I had never produced anything, I had simply appropriated the results of other men's labour."

"What did you say to that?" asked Patty, pressing her needlework down on her knees.

"Well, I told him I hadn't started to make anyone else better, and that's the fact. Did you ever find yourself in a very oppressive atmosphere, now——"

"I sat up for several nights when some of the girls had scarlatina."

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"Ah, you would. But when the morning came, didn't you feel you must get down-stairs and out of the house at all costs?"

"Yes," she said, "that's just how I felt."

"That's how I felt, too. I was dragged up in squalor and abomination unspeakable. I felt I must just get out of it. And I did. I got led on from one thing to another, and now here I am——"

"Learning to play at lawn tennis," she suggested.

"Ah, I'm learning more than that," said Barbrook in a tone which would have alarmed Mrs. Christopherson. But the sword that was hanging over her devoted head was not to fall yet, and she told Sir Weston that everything was going along exactly as she desired.

One hot afternoon Mrs. Christopherson saw her guests set forth after tea, in the hope of finding a breath of air on the shore. She saw them start, Maurice walking with Patty, Helen following with Barbrook, and she watched them out of sight with approving eyes.

By tacit consent they reassorted themselves as soon as they had turned the corner, and by

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the time Helen reached the edge of the cliff the other pair was nowhere to be seen.

Descending by the steep path, Helen went to the water's edge, and as the waves broke white by her feet, the freshness of the air seemed to mitigate the sun's glare.

"Some weighty problem on your mind?" said Maurice presently, as he looked into her face.

"Patty is my problem," she returned.

"Oh, she'll marry Barbrook, if you don't."

"I have done my best to fan the spark into a flame," she said.

"Supererogation!" cried Maurice. "But the situation looks complicated. How is the *dénouement* to be brought about?—though Patty has everything in her favour if she has you."

"Poor mother!" murmured Helen. "I hope we are not making a mistake," she added. "About Josiah, I mean. Oh, how is one to tell when a man's in love, Maurice?"

"The symptoms can't be mistaken."

She looked at him with a laugh. "Tell me what they are," she said.

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"Example is better than precept. Look at Saville. There you see a man far gone."

Helen remained silent awhile, then she said quietly, "You are thinking of my mother."

"A prophet is without honour in his own country," said Maurice, perceiving the scepticism in her tone. "You don't realise that Mrs. Christopherson is still a very charming woman. Don't you like the prospect, Nell?"

"Odious!" she cried. "Almost enough to drive one to marry——"

"Quite so."

"To marry Josiah," she concluded with a laugh. She stopped by the water's edge. "The sea looks languorous in the heat to-day," she said. "If Canute were here this afternoon it wouldn't take the trouble to reach him. Were you ever in love, Maurice?" she asked abruptly.

"All my life," he returned.

"How well you keep a secret!" she exclaimed. "I suppose I mustn't ask who she is."

"Discretion's the better part of valour."

"I think she ought to be someone rather—rather nice, you know."

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" Oh, she is nice," he said.

" What a pity you can't marry—at least not until you're about sixty. I wonder how you'll look when you're sixty, Maurice."

" I hope you may be there to see."

" Tell me what kind of woman she is," urged Helen, staring out to sea.

" Woman doesn't in the least describe her," he answered.

" Young, then ?"

" About your own age."

" Then you must have begun whilst she was quite a—a child."

" Love is infinite, you know, Nell. It has neither beginning nor end."

" Oh, it often has an end," she said, a little sadly. " Is she dark or fair ?"

He looked at her hair, escaping from beneath her straw hat.

" We are talking nonsense!" she cried, turning suddenly towards home.

" Need we get back to sense ?" he whispered.

As their eyes met she knew. She had never felt quite certain before—certain of herself, but not of him. Her light treatment of the sub-



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ject came suddenly to an end; she could not jest about it further.

She could not even look forward to a happy future. She must needs exalt her lover, admitting nothing but the best for him. His career must be as glorious as his merits. He must be distinguished above the common run of men.

"You have said nothing about her defects," said Helen, as they neared the tent.

"Well, she is a little changeable. One can't depend upon her for more than an hour at a time," he cried cheerfully.

"I should prefer to have nothing to do with a person of that kind, Maurice."

"The more the better," he answered.

On entering the garden she saw the others, and as they all neared the house, Helen fell behind with Josiah, so that Mrs. Christopher-son, seeing Maurice return, as he had set forth, with Patty, never doubted that Helen had spent the past hour and a half with Barbrook. She remembered Sir Weston's suggestion only to smile at it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

The following morning at breakfast Maurice astonished everybody by announcing his intention to visit London.

"When are you going?" asked Helen, in a casual tone.

"To-morrow morning," he said.

"You're coming back?" suggested Josiah.

"If Mrs. Christopherson will permit me," he answered.

"My dear Maurice," she exclaimed, "I am only sorry you talk of interrupting our party."

"Well, I need only be away one night," he said.

"Why must you leave us at all?" she asked.

"Oh, a little matter of business," he cried.

"But I didn't see any letters for you this morning," Mrs. Christopherson insisted.

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"Er—no," he said, with a little embarrassment, as Mrs. Christopherson rose from her chair.

As Maurice stood lighting his pipe on the lawn, Helen came to his side.

"Sorry you're going," she said, strolling by his side round the side of the house to the kitchen garden.

"Are you, Nell?" he answered, looking down at her face with a satisfied air.

But he was struck by its peculiar expression of embarrassment. Her hands, too, seemed to show that she was not quite at ease.

"Why are you going?" she asked.

"Anyhow, I shan't be away long. I fancy I have put it off long enough," he continued mysteriously. "The air begins to be full of omens."

"Good omens?"

"Oh, I hope we shall win port at last," he said. "But I daresay there will be some storms to weather first."

"You haven't told me why you are going," she persisted.

"No."

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"Please tell me," she said, with a glance that seemed difficult to resist.

Maurice shook his head, however.

"I don't think I will," he returned.

"You made up your mind rather suddenly," she cried.

"Not without due deliberation."

"You said nothing about it yesterday."

"I had not decided yesterday," he answered, with a tantalising smile.

"When did you decide?"

"In the watches of the night. I lay awake until dawn."

"So did I," she faltered.

"Now," he said, "I wonder whether our vigils had the same origin."

They were walking very slowly along the empty kitchen garden. On their left grew a tall box hedge which effectually screened them from any onlooker at their own level, but that offered no protection from peering eyes in the upper storey of the house. Now Mrs. Christopherson happened to be in the upper storey.

Of her own accord Helen rested her right

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hand on Maurice's arm—an impulsive action, which, like many actions of a maiden, bore a significance to Maurice entirely out of proportion to her meaning. It seemed to him like a voluntary surrender, coming as it did after their conversation of yesterday.

The circumstances of the case prevented him from a straightforward declaration of his love, but Helen understood, and she could not let him depart without this sign of reciprocity!

She spoke with an obvious effort. "I lay awake," she said, "thinking about what you told me."

"In answer to certain questions?" he suggested, pressing her arm to his side.

"I wanted—I thought I ought to say it—it would never do, Maurice."

"What would never do, Nell?"

"For you to marry."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"At least not for years and years, unless your wife were very rich."

"Well, she won't be," he said.

"It would be suicidal," she insisted, "and no woman ought to permit such a sacrifice."

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"Sacrifice!"

"Of all your prospects."

"Oh!" he cried carelessly.

"You can't be blind to the immense difference it must make," she said.

"An immense difference, indeed, Nell."

"You have often told me what you intended to do. Of the great future——"

"Oh, please don't scoff!" he cried. "Besides, you see, at that time I hadn't begun to dream of a greater."

"A greater——"

"Infinitely greater," he insisted.

"You would become just an ordinary practitioner," she said. "You have always set your face against that. You give up every chance of fame——"

"The world well lost," he said, bending over her.

"Ah, but if the girl were worth anything, she wouldn't let you do it."

Maurice looked down at her face a little sentimentally.

"Suppose she happens to love me, Nell?" he whispered.

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"She couldn't let you spoil your career."

They stopped in one of the narrow alleys, Helen looking up into his eyes with her face aflame.

"Would she think a jot about my career if she loved me?" he asked, taking one of her hands.

"The more," she said.

"I don't know about that, dear. For my part, my career was my fetish until—until a little while ago. Now it counts for nothing——"

"Helen!"

It was Mrs. Christopherson's voice at the end of the narrow path.

"Yes, mother," faltered Helen, stepping quickly backwards into the hedge.

"It is too hot for you to be out without your hat. Run indoors directly."

Losing no time, Helen obeyed her mother's command, and Maurice walked away in an opposite direction, whilst Mrs. Christopherson made her way to Patty's room. There she sank into a chair and breathed a deep sigh.

"I wonder," she cried, "whether any woman in this world ever had half my troubles!"

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"What is the matter?" asked Patty in her most sympathetic tone.

"I have tried to shut my eyes to it," she continued. "When Sir Weston sought to open them, I refused to permit him. I wouldn't even breathe a word to you. I tried to hope such a thing couldn't be true, and if Maurice had been my own son I couldn't have placed more complete confidence in him."

"What—what has he done?" asked Patty, bending lower over her work.

"Now, tell me, Patty, haven't you any suspicions?" cried Mrs. Christopherson.

"You see, Auntie, I make it a rule never to suspect anybody."

"If you had I am sure you would have told me," said Mrs. Christopherson. "I have no one else left to trust. If there's one thing I cannot forgive, it is deceit."

"Surely Maurice isn't deceitful," Patty remonstrated.

"I should have said the same. In fact, I did say the same. I even refused to believe the evidence of my own senses. But I really can't blind myself any longer."



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Patty continued to sew very deliberately.

"You haven't told me what he has done," she suggested.

"You will hardly believe me," said poor Mrs. Christopherson, as the tears ran down her cheeks. "And I am sure I hardly know how to tell you. But there it is. All the time I have been confiding in Maurice, and he pretended to listen so sympathetically, he has been intriguing with Helen."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I'm afraid I am sure," was the answer. "Of course, the wisest woman may be mistaken, but after what I have just seen——"

"What have you seen?" cried Patty quickly.

"Helen was out in the garden. She took his arm——"

"Oh, if that is all! You know what an impulsive child——"

"Child—ah!"

"I have often seen her do that, Auntie. You forget how intimate they have always been."

"Still, there are degrees of intimacy."

"You see," said Patty, "if you once get a

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suspicion into your mind, it's so easy to imagine all kinds of things."

"Yes, I know that, Patty. But I would not admit the suspicion. It has been forced on me. No, I said, I refuse to believe anything so shameful."

"I suppose," suggested Patty, after a short silence, "if Maurice had asked Helen to marry him before——"

"How could he?"

"But if he had asked her, you wouldn't have objected, would you?"

"What right has a man in Maurice's position to think of marrying—a girl like Helen?" she added.

"Still, it isn't extraordinary that he should have fallen in love with her—if you are right."

"I am right, Patty. Of course, I shall hear what Helen has to say about it. I can't tell you what a blow this is to me," Mrs. Christopherson cried. "Everything seemed to be going along so smoothly. You know I even asked you to hasten over the trousseau."

"Still, Auntie, you must admit that Helen

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always insisted she would never marry Mr. Barbrook."

"I know that," said Mrs. Christopherson. "I have heard it far too often to forget it. But I tried to hope. Such an excellent match, and Josiah worships the very ground she walks on."

Patty pricked her finger with the needle, and was compelled to put aside her work.

"Besides," Mrs. Christopherson continued, "however much she objected, Helen has always given way. As long as I believed there was no one else, I was able to hope; but now," she exclaimed, throwing her hands out helplessly, "I don't know what to think. I will speak to Helen here, Patty. Suppose you send her to me."

## CHAPTER XIX

Patty rose to go in search of her cousin. She looked into the drawing-room, then into the dining-room, and finally went up-stairs.

There she found Helen, walking rather excitedly about her bedroom.

Patty put on a solemn expression, though the corners of her mouth twitched.

"Auntie has sent me for you," she exclaimed.

"What for?" demanded Helen, a little rebelliously.

"I fancy you will know if you search your mind," said Patty, taking her hands.

"Well, I suppose I must go," sighed Helen, after a moment's hesitation, and she opened the door. Probably she had never descended the stairs quite so slowly and unwillingly in her life. Aware that her behaviour was open to misinterpretation, she dreaded the pending

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interview, and stopping at the foot of the stairs, Helen begged her cousin not to desert her.

She entered the workroom with a poor attempt at courage.

"Did you want me, Mother?" she asked as Patty closed the door. Helen raised her eyebrows with a provoking expression of perfect ingenuousness, which, however, was rather the result of nervousness than of defiance.

It served to kindle Mrs. Christopherson's anger. She had intended to handle the matter diplomatically, fearing, above all things, to provoke her daughter to a confession better unspoken. But anger took complete possession of her.

"I wonder you are not ashamed to look into my face," she cried.

"I am not ashamed of anything."

"Then you ought to be," Mrs. Christopherson retorted. "Your conduct is perfectly disgraceful."

"Will you tell me what I have done?" asked Helen.

"You have deceived me outrageously."

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"How have I deceived you, mother?" said Helen, and Patty now stepped to the front.

"Darling," she murmured, "Auntie fancies you have been a little too—too friendly to Maurice."

"Helen knows quite well what I mean," said Mrs. Christopherson; "and," she added, turning upon her daughter again, "considering your relation to Josiah——"

"I have never deceived you about Josiah," exclaimed Helen.

"Then you actually admit——"

"Mother," said Helen, drawing nearer, "I am not going to admit anything or to deny anything. I am not going to discuss myself at all. But I will tell you this——"

"Nothing you can do or say will ever surprise me again!"

"It is only this," Helen continued, with obvious excitement. "If you think I have any intention to marry Maurice, you are entirely mistaken."

Mrs. Christopherson sat upright with a start. Patty took a step nearer, as deeply astonished as her aunt.

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"If Maurice," Helen repeated, "were to ask me to be his wife either to-day, or next month, or next year, it would be the same. I should say no."

With that Helen walked to the door, leaving Mrs. Christopherson staring blankly at Patty.

"I was right, after all," she cried. "I knew it couldn't be possible. Still, I don't mind confessing things rather alarmed me this morning. However, I don't want to be too exacting."

"N-no," faltered Patty.

"One thing I will say for Helen," said Mrs. Christopherson. "You can always trust her word. She is very, very trying at times, but I have never known her to be untruthful yet."

When Mrs. Christopherson went away, Patty made no attempt to go on with her work. Leaning back in her chair, she sat staring out at the garden and listening to the murmur of the sea, until presently, rising, she once more made her way to Helen's room.

"What is it all about?" she asked, placing an arm about her cousin's waist, both girls on the verge of tears.

"Oh, you know; you heard," said Helen.

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"But what had gone before, dear?"

"I merely walked with Maurice in the garden, and my mother spied upon us."

"She came to me afterwards," said Patty, "and I don't think I ever felt so much ashamed before."

"Why?" demanded Helen.

"She insisted that she had found out Maurice had been intriguing with you; that was her phrase. She questioned me, and—and what could I say? I had to equivocate horribly. But what could I do, Helen? I couldn't give you away."

Helen shifted her position a little uneasily.

"I wish you wouldn't speak like that," she said. "But, anyhow, you heard what I said."

"Why did you say it?" asked Patty, rather eagerly.

"It was exactly the truth," Helen rejoined; "and if it would make my mother happier," she added a little bitterly, "it was as well she should hear it."

"Have you and Maurice quarrelled then?"

"Of course not. Quarrelled! What should we quarrel about?"



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Patty looked completely at a loss.

"I can't imagine," she said; "but if you haven't, what does it mean? Because I thought you had grown rather fond of Maurice."

Averting her head, Helen stared hard at the ceiling for several seconds. Then, abruptly, she looked full into her cousin's face.

"I don't care," she exclaimed. "I am very fond of him."

"Yet you say you won't marry him."

"I am too fond of him to dream of marrying him," said Helen, with a superior air.

"I don't understand——"

"You know that Maurice can't marry unless he buys a practice, and that implies leaving the hospital. It has always been his ambition to remain there. His future depends on that. Maurice is very clever and very ambitious——"

"And you," cried Patty, quite cheerful again, "are the sweetest, most self-sacrificing child in the world."

"I don't feel much like a child," said Helen, with tears in her eyes.

"You talk rather like one," said Patty, with

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a laugh. "Wait a little while. Wait until Maurice——"

"He has——"

"What?" cried Patty.

"At least almost," said Helen, with crimson cheeks. "And I told him what I have just told my mother."

"Ah, but he wasn't so credulous, Helen!"

"You don't think I mean it," cried Helen rather quickly, as Patty dared to laugh again.

"I know you meant it at the time, dear. We all know you're quite like young George Washington, you couldn't tell a lie. But you changeable persons are deceivers for all that."

"I shall never change," Helen insisted.

"Of course, if you don't believe me——"

"Oh, I don't, dear!"

"You distrust my word," said Helen, offended.

"I trust Maurice's good sense," Patty retorted.

"He knows my decision won't alter."

"He is as firmly convinced as I am," said Patty.

"I shall convince you both," answered

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Helen. "I feel I would sooner do anything than ruin his future."

"But if he wishes it to be ruined?"

"Anyhow, I won't be the one to do it," said Helen.

Patty laughed still, and, thoroughly nettled, Helen suggested it was time to prepare for luncheon. When she entered the dining-room, Mrs. Christopherson thought she really might have taken more pains to remove the marks of her tears. She wondered what Josiah must think, and in order to convince him that she had no hand in the matter, Mrs. Christopherson treated her daughter with demonstrative affection.

Maurice, afraid that he knew the cause of Helen's distress, and unwilling to attract Mrs. Christopherson's attention again, stepped out on to the lawn with Patty, who did not wait for him to begin.

"How foolish you are!" she said, in a low voice. "You show your hand too plainly."

"If it comes to that, I don't care a rap. I am prepared to throw my cards face upwards on the table," he answered.

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"You ought to care. It makes things bad for Helen. Besides, one must be off with the old love before one is on with the new."

"Oh, if you are going in for proverbs," said Maurice, "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

"I don't seem able to apply that," Patty retorted.

"You might lend a helping hand," he suggested.

"What can I do?"

"Help to get the old—the old love off," said Maurice.

"I!" cried Patty, raising her eyebrows with an ingenuous expression.

"We are not all so blind as Mrs. Christopherson, you know."

For once Patty looked completely embarrassed. She looked almost like a guilty thing, and she could not find a retort.

"There's a storm brewing, you see," Maurice continued. "There's bound to be a rum-pus sooner or later—sooner probably; and it seems that we are all in it. No doubt Mrs. Christopherson thinks we are puppets in her

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hands. Even now I believe she expects that Helen will end by marrying Barbrook.

"And you?" asked Patty, though her manner still seemed chastened.

"Oh, well, of course, I know that Barbrook no more wishes to marry Helen than Helen wishes to marry him."

"I feel sure he doesn't," said Patty.

"Nobody is in a better position to judge," Maurice rejoined. "But here's the difficulty; Barbrook prides himself on being a man of his word. Whatever his wish may be, he won't back out as long as he thinks Helen wants him to stay. Now," Maurice continued, "we don't know what he hears from Mrs. Christopher; and, besides, Helen has treated him much more amiably lately."

Patty was silent for some time. She seemed to be weighing his words.

"Then," she said, "you think that Helen and Mr. Barbrook are playing at cross purposes?"

"Undoubtedly. Anyone who wishes him well ought to lose no time in enlightening him. A gentle hint, you know."

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"Surely you wish him well," she suggested.

"Oh, dear, yes. I wish him the best of all possible fortune—a wife whom he loves and who——"

"What takes you to London?" she interrupted abruptly.

"I shall not talk about myself."

"I thought that was what you had been doing," she retorted.

"I shall speak quite plainly when the time comes," he insisted; "but as far as I'm concerned, it has not come yet."

"You imagine Helen will be pleased to hear you?" Patty asked.

"That's the foundation of all my hopes."

"Yet she insists that she won't listen," said Patty. "You know, Maurice, there's been a kind of inquest, and though Helen sticks to her point, she vows she—she won't——"

"Did she tell you that?" Maurice asked.

"She told Mrs. Christopherson, too."

"Ah, that was a pity," he said, without the least dismay.

"It doesn't appear to alarm you," she suggested.

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"Not in the least," Maurice answered confidently.

During the afternoon he took the precaution to avoid Helen, not desiring to be forced into an untimely explanation. His plans were all cut and dried, but he was anxious to leave Elderstrand without being taxed by Mrs. Christopherson, who, he knew, must be not a little suspicious. Helen was thrown with Josiah that afternoon, but it was only after a long time and considerable hesitation that he said :

"I'm afraid you have been in trouble about something."

"Oh, nothing of—of the slightest consequence," she answered.

"I suppose I must hardly say I have a right to ask you what it is," he persisted.

"Certainly not," Helen retorted. "Nothing could be more ridiculous."

It was not until past six o'clock that, seeing Patty alone on the lawn, Barbrook joined her.

"I have been wanting to see you," he began.

"You saw me at afternoon tea."

"Ah, but that's a horse of another colour,"

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he said. "You're always different, somehow, when I get you alone."

"You don't approve of my company manners," she suggested.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I approve of you down to the ground. But," he added, "I've a kind of feeling I'm walking over a mine. I almost look for an explosion. I'll swear something's going on in the dark."

"Oh, what is the use of being so suspicious?" she cried.

"For one thing," he insisted, "Helen had been crying before lunch. I can take my oath of that. Now, it's a thing I can't bear—to see a woman cry."

"It's a habit some women have, you know."

"Not you," he said.

"My life has always run on such even lines."

"Some people would think them rather hard lines," he said, stooping towards her.

"It just depends how you take them," she rejoined. "A merry heart goes all the day."

"Just so; but Helen didn't look very merry,



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and I want you to tell me what was the matter."

"To betray her confidence!" said Patty, in slight confusion.

"I know it wouldn't be any use to expect that," he answered. "Still, I want to know."

"Ask her."

"I've done that. You see, I feel my hands are tied—tongue, too. I am getting rather out of my depth. I know what I want to do, yet I can't see my way to do it. I've got among a new set of people. I know I'm not their sort, and that makes me more particular to do the right thing—if you understand what I mean."

"I think I understand, Mr. Barbrook."

"If you don't, no one else will," he said. "Now I want to know whether Helen had been crying because of me."

"No," answered Patty, and he looked disappointed.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "I thought she might have been. I've a great admiration for Mrs. Christopherson, but it strikes me she'd just ride over us neck and crop if we stood in her

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way. You know," he added, "I never used to believe it when I read that women were harder to understand than men."

"You believe it now?"

"I do, indeed."

"Which of us perplexes you?" she asked, with a laugh.

"Not you. You're honest and straightforward. But I own I can't understand your cousin, and I wish you'd help me."

After a moment's hesitation Patty said: "It was about Maurice."

"What about Vaughan?" asked Jcsiah, with obvious eagerness.

Patty remembered her recent conversation with Maurice.

"My aunt," she said, "fancied Helen had been a little indiscreet——"

At that moment they were joined by Helen herself, but Barbrook determined that the subject should be resumed at the very earliest opportunity.

## CHAPTER XX

When Sir Weston rode in at the gate the following morning, Mrs. Christopherson met him at the door, and, dismounting, he accompanied her to the chairs beneath the sycamore tree.

"I mustn't stay," he said; "the fact is, I'm going to ride all the morning. I really must take more exercise."

"You seem never to be doing anything else," she exclaimed.

"Not half enough," he answered. "This air is too bracing. I had an idea of speaking to Vaughan—you don't think it unadvisable?"

His round, healthily tinted face looked so eager and so robust that Mrs. Christopherson found it difficult to repress a smile. She answered quite gravely, however.

"I think Maurice is extremely clever," she said, "but he has gone to London."

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"Then you found I was right?" Sir Weston asked.

"No, quite wrong. As far as Helen is concerned, at all events."

"Of course, it was a mere suggestion, you know, Florence. I had never seen them together. Only, if you throw two young people together, and neither of them is positively repulsive——"

"I can't answer for Maurice, Weston."

"Oh, hang Vaughan, so that Helen doesn't prove fickle!" he said.

"I asked her," Mrs. Christopherson explained. "I confess I saw something which made me a little—well, a little suspicious. There is nothing like a full explanation, so I asked her."

"Well?" he said anxiously.

"She vowed that no earthly consideration would ever induce her to marry him."

"Good!" cried Sir Weston, pulling down his waistcoat. "Excellent!"

"But whether Maurice has been going a little too far, or whether they have been just amusing themselves, is more than I can tell

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you. All I know is that Helen protests she has no idea of marrying him, and she always tells the truth. If anything, she is a little too truthful."

"Well, if I sit here, this place will be the death of me," Sir Weston exclaimed, not making any attempt to rise.

"Then why do you stay?"

"You ask me that?" he said, with a languishing air.

She laughed cheerfully, and it was not until half an hour later that he remounted his bicycle.

As he rode away, Sir Weston realised that it would be a tremendous wrench to break with Florence now. He hoped devoutly that Helen would behave like a sensible girl, and determined, when she married Barbrook, to bestow upon her a very handsome wedding present.

As Mrs. Christopherson reëntered the house she met Helen, who seemed rather like a fish out of water since Maurice had set forth early that morning.

"Where is Josiah?" asked Mrs. Christopherson amicably.

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"I think he is smoking somewhere about the garden."

"You shouldn't leave him alone, dear girl."

"Oh, Jones is there," cried Helen, and her mother's smile became a frown.

Helen sat down on the chair Mrs. Christopherson had just left. She put forth her feet and leaned backwards, staring at the sunny lawn. It was too hot even to go down to her tent, from which, however, she had bathed early that morning.

Leaning back in her chair she fell into a day-dream.

She did not dream of Josiah. He had passed in a manner beyond the realm of her acute interest. There had been a period when she felt immensely troubled about him, believing she was about to deliver a crushing blow.

Helen knew better now. True, there must be a formal rupture, but the method did not trouble her any longer; because Mrs. Christopherson must perceive that circumstances alone were to blame. Josiah preferred Patty, and it would be too ridiculous to blame Helen for that fact. Meantime, he caused no trouble.

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He had ceased to exert a lover's privileges. She treated him as an ordinary guest, and, indeed, Helen had never liked him so well as she had done since Maurice awakened her to the truth.

She did not dream of Josiah this morning. Her thoughts followed Maurice to London; she lamented his hot journey, and wondered what had caused it. She called up the picture of him as he was driven away from the door that morning; she tried to recollect every word he had spoken by the sea the day before yesterday.

She told herself how deeply she loved him, and remembered that she was enduring a martyrdom for his sake.

She tried to realise the beginning of her love, and felt constrained to admit, very reluctantly, that the day she left London he had never appeared as a probable husband.

Yet, strangely enough, she had thought of him in that way before he arrived at Elderstrand. It seemed almost as if someone had administered a philtre to bewitch her, and the witch was Patty.

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Helen could not doubt that Patty had entertained designs upon Josiah before his visit began; that, with the deliberate intention to further these, her cousin had influenced her mind and skilfully fomented rebellion.

Was Patty's motive love or lucre? In the former case, Helen could excuse many things which yet did not seem quite "nice." She could not have acted in that manner herself, but she could still retain a fair opinion of Patty if she had schemed only to attract the man she loved.

Love seemed to sanction everything. At first Helen had thought only of her own bliss; but later she became conscious of a desire only to exalt Maurice, to put aside self completely, even taking a pleasure in suffering that he might gain.

Martyrdom was not without its compensation. It was sweet to endure for his sake, and she had never felt more in earnest or more firmly meant what she said than when she told Mrs. Christopherson she would not marry him.

Yet so inconsistent was Helen that, as she leaned back in the shade this morning, her



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dream began to take an agreeable turn, with the happy disparity of dreams. She was denying herself for Maurice, whilst yet her future seemed to be inextricably woven with his.

Why had he gone to London? Suppose he was at that moment taking an irrevocable step, saying farewell to the hospital, making arrangements to buy a practice! A deplorable thing to spoil his career, especially after all she had said on that subject; but still——

In the meantime Mr. Barbrook was strolling rather moodily about the garden. A pipe was between his lips, his hands were thrust in his pockets, and he felt almost relieved to see Jones coming out of the cucumber house.

“A splendid morning!” cried Josiah.

“Better if we had some rain,” answered Jones gruffly. “Ground’s as hard as bricks.”

“I never came across a satisfied gardener yet,” said Barbrook. “If it rains you want shine, and if it’s dry you cry out for wet.”

“Some’s satisfied so precious easy,” Jones retorted. “You dunnow what to do with yourself, young Dr. Vaughan being away, I suppose.”

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"He's coming back to-morrow."

"Ah, she misses him, I lay," said Jones in a significant tone. "I ain't blind nor deaf neither. Grows together natural like them two does. You put that in your pipe, Josey."

The words failed of their intended effect, and seeing Barbrook smile as he lounged away, Jones stared after him and scratched his cheek with a muddy forefinger.

Nothing could please Barbrook more than any fresh confirmation of his own hopes. Having asked Helen to be his wife, he was prepared to marry her if she wished. At one time he had been forced to the opinion that she desired nothing of the kind, but then his mind wavered.

Her manner might easily deceive him, as, indeed, Maurice had suggested, and Josiah could scarcely be aware that Helen's increased amiability was due only to the conviction of his own indifference.

But he could conceive the infinite delight of life with Patty.

Apart from any question of regard, as Helen's husband he would be either a nonentity

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or a perpetual member of that society of which he was already weary. Helen, beautiful and rich, must become a great lady; now Josiah no longer desired to become the husband of such a one. Patty had spoiled him for that. As Mrs. Christopherson might say, his tastes were "bourgeois," rather "low," indeed. The necessity to be always on his best behaviour irked him. He preferred ease in his own home; he liked slippers, old coats, and pipes. He liked to talk of his early days to a sympathetic listener. Helen did not care a straw about his past, whilst Patty never yet had failed to appear interested. He believed that she loved him, and he felt almost like a boy again; nor, in her case, did it seem quite incongruous.

He could picture Patty amongst children, their own children. In short, seeing which way his happiness lay, he cursed the day, yet hardly wondering she had bewitched him, when he asked Helen to be his wife.

Still, he *had* asked her, and he was prepared to do his duty if she wished. But he profoundly hoped she did not desire anything of the kind.

## CHAPTER XXI

On the night of Maurice's absence in London, though hardly in consequence of his absence, Mrs. Christopherson slept badly.

Soon after her head touched the pillow she began to think about Helen, and soon felt quite wide awake. Time was passing; before very many days Mr. Barbrook's visit would come to an end. Now, Mrs. Christopherson had promised, and she had no intention to break her word, that she would tell Josiah the truth if Helen still wished her to do so.

Mrs. Christopherson could not understand her daughter; for whilst Helen really behaved very nicely towards Josiah, she yet insisted, whenever the occasion arose, that she would never become his wife. Would Helen give way again as she had given way more than once already, or was there a great disappointment in store?

Well, there was a great disappointment in

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store for Mrs. Christopherson, and of a kind she little anticipated. However, she could not sleep. She turned from side to side until past one o'clock, and then closed her eyes only to reopen them at five.

She felt quite wide awake, and knew at once that further sleep was out of the question. An hour or two later, Mrs. Christopherson probably believed that a "special Providence" inspired her to awake early this morning; at the time, however, she lamented the fact sincerely.

The sun streamed into the room through the Venetian blind, and at about half-past six Mrs. Christopherson rose. By seven she was in the garden. During the past few days, in order to hasten the completion of Helen's trousseau, Patty had put in some work before breakfast, and now her aunt determined to relieve her solitude.

It was a glorious morning. The glare of the sun, already fierce, was tempered by a faint breeze. The murmur of the sea formed a distant chorus to the twittering of birds. Like most persons to whom such experiences are

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rare, Mrs. Christopherson began to marvel that she had not risen at half-past six each morning of her life. A pity that Helen should be still asleep, and that Josiah would not leave his room for another hour or more. It really seemed slothful.

Mrs. Christopherson, finding the grass dewy, walked along the path, with the intention of turning by the side of the house to Patty's workroom. On reaching the corner, however, she stopped abruptly, a curious, wavering expression on her face. Mrs. Christopherson sniffed. Tobacco! and of that inferior kind which common men inflict on their betters in the street. She believed it was known as shag.

It was like Jones's impudence! What right had he to indulge his vulgar tastes underneath the bedroom windows? She would certainly tell Jones what she thought of him.

But not for a moment did Mrs. Christopherson expect to meet the gardener round the corner. There are facts so appalling that the human mind cannot grasp them at once. She knew that Josiah smoked that kind of tobacco.

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She knew that she should find Josiah in Patty's room. Innumerable incidents, trivial, unnoticed at the time, were now concentrated in her mind. If she had believed the offender to be Jones, she would not have stayed to think about him; she would have hastened round the corner, have pounced upon him, caught him in the act, and held his conduct up to reproach.

As it happened, she advanced with stealthy tread; she stole round the corner, stepped on the grass, in spite of its dewy condition, and crossed it at an angle until she reached a spot whence she could command a complete view of the interior of the workroom.

Then Mrs. Christopherson turned.

She saw her niece, she saw Patty, sitting by the sewing-machine, her elbows on the table, her hands supporting her chin, her eyes raised to Josiah's. And amidst her wrath Mrs. Christopherson observed that her neice looked as bright and fresh, altogether as charming, as the morning.

And Josiah—the man who worshipped the ground which Helen walked upon! Josiah was bending low, his attitude was one of ridicu-

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lous devotion, whilst the cat rubbed its arched back slowly against his legs.

Unseen, Mrs. Christopherson beat a hasty retreat. She succeeded, almost against her expectation, in reaching the chairs beneath the sycamore tree. She sank on to one of their damp seats, staring before her like a woman stupified.

All her gods were fallen! But this was the unkindest cut of all.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" she ought to have cried, only the phrase did not occur to her at the moment.

That Josiah was talking foolishness to Patty was as plain as that Patty was a willing, an eager listener.

Mrs. Christopherson became conscious of an intolerable loneliness. During Helen's first rebellion Patty had been her confidante and her consolation. Her own familiar friend had betrayed her. A little later Josiah came forth from the workroom. Seeing Mrs. Christopherson, he came to a sudden standstill and she read guilt in his face.

"You are out early," she said, as he approached.



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"To tell you the truth——"

"I am sure you would not tell me anything but the truth, Josiah."

"No, I should hold my tongue," he said.

"The fact is, I have a bad habit of smoking before breakfast. At one time I used to begin work very early——"

"Then you always come out before breakfast?" she suggested.

"Not—not always," he said, for she looked as if she expected an answer.

"Always lately?"

"I have been trying to induce Miss Winter to come out," he said.

"Oh, Patty is so difficult to turn from her duty," cried Mrs. Christopherson, rising.

Beyond depriving Patty of the customary morning kiss, Mrs. Christopherson made no difference towards her niece. In truth, she felt annoyed at her own impotence for revenge. If she brought matters to a crisis, she would only hasten the *dénouement*, which she perceived she could scarcely prevent.

When Sir Weston arrived at eleven o'clock, still nothing had been done. Patty was busily

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working at Helen's trousseau, though Mrs. Christopherson perceived that this was now a hollow mockery.

"Has Vaughan returned yet?" asked Sir Weston.

"I expect him some time to-day," she answered. "Weston," Mrs. Christopherson added, "I have had the most painful disillusioning."

"Who is it this time?" he asked.

"Patty—my niece—of all persons in the world."

"I thought Miss Winter was entirely harmless, Florence."

"Nothing but my own eyes could have convinced me," she said. "Oh, how blind I have been! I trusted Patty implicitly, and, as you say, I regarded her as harmless."

"Been flirting with Barbrook?" Sir Weston suggested.

"If it were nothing worse than that. Weston, I am not exacting. I can allow for human weakness, but I cannot forgive deceit. I am afraid she has been playing an underhanded game throughout. Such barefaced deception.

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When I think of it, I scarcely know how to control myself."

Sir Weston began to pace fretfully about the drawing-room. Observing the real concern in his face, Mrs. Christopherson felt grateful for such genuine sympathy. He was a great support in her distress. But Sir Weston was upbraiding himself rather than Miss Winter. He ought to have realised that slips are frequent between cups and lips. He ought to have exercised a discreet patience, and to have waited until Helen was safely disposed of.

Still, he tried to take a hopeful view of the case. His wish was father to the thought that perhaps Florence was exaggerating the evil—unconsciously, of course.

"Well, well," he said, "I shouldn't do anything rash."

"I have no intention," she answered. "That is what I realise. If I speak to Patty and she denies it, as of course she will do, what proof have I? None whatever at present."

"What about Barbrook?" asked Sir Weston.

"I regard Josiah as a victim," she said.

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"Been amusing himself, very likely. Men do that sort of thing, you know."

"Not Josiah," she insisted. "He has no idea of amusing himself. No, depend upon it, Patty has succeeded in entangling him."

"Still, keep him up to the scratch, Florence. Turn a blind eye, and before he goes away make him fix the day."

When he went away, Mrs. Christopherson began to wonder whether he might not be right. But it was hard not to open her mind to Patty. If she did so, however, and Helen heard of the occurrence, whatever Josiah might be willing to do, the girl would have none of him. And, really, it would be difficult to blame her.

In spite of some evidence to the contrary, the amount of energy which a human being is capable of expending in anger is necessarily limited. Now that Mrs. Christopherson's wrath was directed against Patty, she felt quite tolerant towards her daughter. The child, though sinning, had been more deeply sinned against.

Mrs. Christopherson determined to be cau-

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tious. What she desired was positive proof, evidence which Patty must admit. Once she had obtained that, it would be necessary to decide upon her mode of action. But to obtain such evidence must be the first consideration.

## CHAPTER XXII

It was five o'clock that afternoon, and everybody was present in the drawing-room when Maurice returned from London.

"Just in time to have some tea," cried Helen, ringing the bell.

"Your business in London didn't keep you very long, Maurice," said Mrs. Christopherson, as Helen attended to his wants.

"The fact is," he answered, with an air of some importance, "I haven't quite finished it. I am afraid I shall be compelled to run up again to-morrow."

"Surely it was hardly worth while to come back to-day then," said Mrs. Christopherson.

"You might have sent me a telegram."

"You see, I was bound to fetch my port-manteau," he rejoined. "Besides, I want to say good-bye to everybody."

Mrs. Christopherson offered no remon-

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strance. She made no attempt to urge him to prolong his visit; in fact, she had not the heart to attempt to persuade anybody to do anything.

Until it was time to dress for dinner Mrs. Christopherson kept her guests sedulously together, and it soon became evident to each one of them that their hostess had something on her mind. To Patty she had scarcely spoken during the day, whilst Maurice began to think that one of the storms at which he had hinted was on the point of bursting.

Towards the end of dinner, however, Mrs. Christopherson appeared to revive. As she rose from her chair, she turned graciously to Barbrook.

"You ought to finish the day as you began it," she said. "I found Mr. Barbrook smoking in the garden before breakfast; now is not that a very unwholesome practice, Maurice?" she asked in a tone calculated to allay suspicion.

"Shocking!" cried Maurice.

"You cannot do better than do the same after dinner," she continued, turning to Josiah,

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"and it is such a lovely evening, we will all keep you company."

She had never offered to accompany them hitherto, but there was nothing in the suggestion to put Patty on her guard. Maurice, however, looked at Mrs. Christopherson reflectively.

"Now, girls," she cried, "suppose you put on your hats."

Barbrook stepped on to the lawn, and taking out his cigar case, offered it to Maurice. A few minutes later Mrs. Christopherson reappeared with the others.

"How cool it is this evening," she remarked. "Really, Helen, you ought to put on your cloak."

"But, mother, it seems so intensely hot——"

"Please go to fetch your cloak, dear," Mrs. Christopherson insisted, and Helen departed forthwith. As soon as she had reëntered the house, her mother added: "You need not wait, Josiah; if you and Patty stroll on we will overtake you before you reach the cliff."

Barbrook walked on directly, and with Patty by his side, turned round the corner of the house.



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"Do you know, Maurice," said Mrs. Christopherson, "I think it will be better if Helen stays indoors this evening. I notice a dampness in the air. Kindly see she goes indoors at once."

With that she followed Patty, leaving Maurice staring after her, not exactly surprised, though quite confident that she was carrying out some previously concocted scheme. When Helen reappeared on the scene, with a drab Highland cloak thrown carelessly over her shoulders, he delivered Mrs. Christopherson's message.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I can't imagine what my mother is thinking of. It is one of the hottest evenings we have had."

"That's very likely," he said significantly. "But I have given you your orders, and now I am going to see you obey them." And taking her arm, he led her into the drawing-room.

"Yet my mother is staying out herself," Helen expostulated.

"Oh, that is for Patty's sake."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, throwing her cloak on to a chair.

"There's evidently something in the wind,"

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he said. "I fancy we shall be enlightened before long."

"You don't think my mother suspects——"

"The marvel is she hasn't suspected long ago. Immunity makes these young persons rash. Anyhow," he added, as Helen sat down on the sofa, "it's out of our power to avert their fate, and, after all, it probably won't be very tragic."

Helen raised her hands to take off her hat, which she placed beside her on the sofa.

"Why are you going to London again to-morrow?" she asked, as Maurice stood before her, his hands resting on his hips, a contented expression on his face.

"On the same business which took me yesterday," he answered.

"You didn't tell me what that was."

"Well, I'll tell you now," he said; "in the first place, I went to the hospital——"

"You have obtained an appointment?" she exclaimed.

"No, I went to say good-bye, Nell," he answered rather gravely.

"Good-bye!"

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"Then I went to an agent to inquire about a practice. After that I called at the bank to arrange about funds."

"Oh, how impetuous you are!" she cried, hardly knowing whether to smile or to frown.

"I don't think any reasonable person can call me impetuous," he answered, sitting down close by her side.

"You cherish a definite ideal for years and throw it away in a day," she retorted.

"Not without counting the cost, though."

"An immense cost," she murmured.

"I am not going to deny that," he said. "To tell you the truth, it was a wrench. But —*le roi est mort, vive le roi!* I had one or two practices to investigate, and I have almost decided which to buy."

"Is—is it in the country?" she asked, with a good deal of suppressed excitement.

"At South Kensington. You see, when I began to look into things, I found I could muster more than enough for something first-rate. The man has to turn out for his health's sake, and my idea is to take over his house, his servants, his furniture, and all that is his."

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"Still you have not actually committed yourself."

"Irrevocably," he insisted. "At least I shall never return to the hospital. I have still the accounts to investigate and all that sort of thing, hence my departure to-morrow."

"Then your future is ruined," she said.

"On the contrary, it is assured. I shall possess all the requirements of a good Philistine: a good house, a fair income, and, Nell," he added, leaning forward towards her, "you know what I want to make the thing perfect."

Helen looked down at her hands, and he, following her glance, covered them with one of his.

"We need not speak any longer in parables," he said. "It's true you are nominally engaged to Barbrook, but that has been a farce ever since the day I arrived here."

"Be—before that," she murmured.

"I fancied I had discovered the reason of your revolt," he continued.

"It was Patty," she said, turning a crimson face towards him. "She told me that you——"

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"Yes," he urged.

"That you——"

Helen broke down again, but her eyes told what she could not find words to express.

"Anyhow, Patty is a person of great discrimination," he said.

"I can't satisfy myself about her," Helen exclaimed. "Now I look back, it seems that she deliberately sought to set me against Josiah."

"But, darling, that is just what I have to be thankful for."

"You know we have no right to—to be talking like this," she expostulated. "And I—I told you I would not allow you to sacrifice your prospects."

"It's a day after the fair," he said.

"I meant it at the time," she insisted. "I never felt more in earnest about anything."

"But now, Nell?"

She did not answer. She felt exceedingly happy. It was too late to expostulate.

"I want to do everything decently and in order," he said. "As yet the practice isn't mine. I may even have to look for another."

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I intend to take possession and get things into working order. Then I shall lay siege to Mrs. Christopherson with all formality. I don't imagine she will raise any obstacle."

"Oh, I--I hope not," said Helen, with an eager face. Her lips were very close to Maurice's, and he kissed them.

## CHAPTER XXIII

Mrs. Christopherson had never in her life wilfully played the eavesdropper. If she had accidentally found herself in a position of advantage, she may have remained to listen, but she had never gone an inch out of her way to hear what was not intended for her.

She would have considered such conduct as quite unworthy of her; as a meanness to which she could not stoop. But revolutions are not made with rosewater. On an occasion of extreme emergency, it is weakness to be too scrupulous, and if a definite end is to be gained, one must not be exigent about the means.

On leaving Maurice outside the drawing-room window, she followed Barbrook and her niece at a safe distance, until they reached the maze-like alleys, which seemed to have been made for her purpose. There, losing sight of

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her quarry, she quickened her pace until she came to a narrow strip of grass bordered by flower beds, one of which touched the hedge.

On the farther side of this hedge Josiah and Patty were strolling, entirely unconscious of the fate in store for them. At first Mrs. Christopherson could with difficulty distinguish their words, but presently she began to hear all they said only too distinctly.

"I fancy Maurice is by way of leaving the hospital and buying a practice," said Patty, evidently answering a question of Josiah's.

Maurice buying a practice without mentioning his intention! This was a severe shock in itself. Why should Maurice suddenly decide to leave the hospital?

"I'm a man who hates to beat about the bush," said Josiah. "I like to know just where I am."

"Don't you begin to have a suspicion?" asked Patty, in such a tone that her aunt could have boxed her ears.

"I know where I should like to be," he said.

"Where?" asked Patty, in a dreamy voice, and Mrs. Christopherson felt quite disgusted.



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"Why, just here," he answered, with a laugh. "Only I'd like the circumstances to be different, you know. I feel we're coming to a crisis. Something's got to be done, and if I could only feel certain——"

"About what?" asked Patty, and Mrs. Christopherson's face did not wear a very agreeable expression as she listened, walking as close to the hedge as the narrow flower bed permitted, and straining her nerves not to miss a word.

"You see," he said, "it's no use pretending we're not playing at cross purposes. But I'd like to know who's going to begin to undo the tangle. I think you understand what I want, and I hope to get it. The sooner the better, only I want you to give the signal."

"Me!" cried Patty, and Mrs. Christopherson found restraint irksome. She longed to utter her profound indignation, to cry out upon her guilty niece, and to make things generally distressing for her scarcely less culpable companion.

"I'm a man of my word," Josiah insisted, not for the first time. "If I say I'll do a

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thing, I do it. I've asked Helen to be my wife. She said 'Yes,' and I'd rather throw myself over the cliff than break faith."

Towards Josiah Mrs. Christopherson began almost to relent. She admired his sentiment; but, on the other hand, it showed Patty's conduct in a blacker hue than ever. This man was the soul of honour; but, alas! he had become the prey of a scheming woman.

"Even though you have ceased to wish that she should be your wife?" said Patty.

"That's how I feel," he answered. "Come to that, I never—you see a man may admire a woman very much—your cousin is a charming girl; though it's true she doesn't care a hang for me. I'm not quite a fool," he continued. "I fancy I know how things are with Vaughan." Mrs. Christopherson drew in her breath. "At one time I was afraid he was on a different tack; but I haven't any fear of Vaughan now. Now," he said, "I want you to help me. If you think Helen intends to marry him, sooner or later, I'll have it out with her the first thing to-morrow morning. But if you tell me she doesn't, why I shall just let things

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slide, cost what it may. And," he added, "it will cost me a good deal. Still, I'm a man of my word."

Now here was a definite issue. The case lay in a nutshell. Patty had everything in her own hands. It was for her to speak the word. If she acted as any woman with the slightest sense of decency must act, Barbrook would still be willing to marry Helen.

But then Mrs. Christopherson perceived that it was almost too late to conceive that Helen would consent to marry him. Why had she refused to be warned by Sir Weston? It was evident that his suspicion was amply justified, and that Maurice's duplicity was equalled only by Patty's.

"I don't think anything can be gained by refusing to tell you the truth," said Patty, not without a little hesitation. "You have no need to bother about keeping your word to Helen. Before you came here she told us all she would not marry you."

"Why didn't she speak to me honestly?" he demanded.

"My aunt persuaded her to keep silence

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until your visit ended. But Helen has never really wavered. She is very—very fond of Maurice——”

This was more than Mrs. Christopherson could endure. Forgetting everything but her just indignation, forgetting that Patty had no idea of her propinquity, she demanded through the hedge:

“Then why, in heaven’s name, did she vow she would never marry him?”

Patty clutched Josiah’s arm as he started back with a fervent exclamation on his lips. For a moment their eyes met in the dim light; then, turning abruptly away, Patty fled towards the house. She went straight to her own room, whilst a few minutes later Barbrook entered his, without saying good-night to anybody.

Miss Patty Winter was overcome by panic; but even if she had been in a condition to take thought of her action, she could not perhaps have done better. That she had to go through a painful ordeal was obvious, but so also was the fact that no witness to it was desirable.

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She entered her bedroom, but she did not lock its door. She sat down in the arm-chair by the dressing-table, and tried to steady her nerves for the impending visitation.

Patty had not long to wait. A single loud rap at the door, and, without staying for permission, Mrs. Christopherson entered like a hurricane. She was glowing with righteous indignation, her eyes gleamed with anger, she did not stay to choose her words.

"So, I have found you out!" she began before the door was shut. "Fortunately I have found you out."

"Auntie——"

"There is not the slightest need for argument," said Mrs. Christopherson, with an imperious movement of her right hand. "I trusted you, I befriended you, and, it's true, I never expected gratitude; but I certainly did not expect deceit. Nothing could be so base. You deliberately set yourself to entrap Josiah——"

"No, no," cried Patty, covering her face with her hands and shivering slightly.

"Can you look into my face and deny that

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you poisoned Helen's mind ? ” demanded Mrs. Christopherson.

“ Yes, ” said Patty, lowering her hands.

Mrs. Christopherson drew nearer, she looked into Patty's face with a fearsome frown.

“ You tell me you did not deliberately turn the girl's mind against him ? ” she insisted, and Patty seemed to cower.

“ I—I only warned her, ” she said.

“ Warned her ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Christopherson with intense contempt. “ And, pray, what did you warn her against ? ”

“ I knew she didn't care for Mr. Barbrook. ”

“ Before she told you ? ” Mrs. Christopherson continued.

“ I knew Helen didn't care for him from the first. ”

“ And, of course, you did care for him, ” was the answer. “ Oh, I understand what you cared for. From the outset—before you came to Elderstrand, you made up your mind to entangle him. You not only warned Helen, as you call it, against Josiah, you tried to put Maurice in his place. ”

Patty looked up quickly.

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"Not in his place," she said quietly.

"You try to infuriate me," retorted Mrs. Christopherson, clenching her fists until the nails hurt her palms; "but I am not going to lose my temper. I insist upon an answer. Did you or did you not attempt to turn Helen towards Maurice?"

"I knew Maurice was fond of her," Patty admitted.

"You told her that?"

"Ye-es," said Patty.

"And then," Mrs. Christopherson continued, with withering scorn, "I suppose you completed your work by telling Maurice that Helen was fond of him."

"She is," Patty answered.

"Until you put the idea into her head it had no place there," cried Mrs. Christopherson. "I can see your scheme. The poor child was clay in your hands. She would have married Josiah. You persuaded her that Maurice liked her—you cultivated the idea, and then when that had grown strong enough to please you, you went to Maurice and repeated the process for his benefit."

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"That was unnecessary," Patty insisted. "I spoke to them both honestly. Every word I said was true."

"Does that justify your conduct, do you think?" Mrs. Christopherson demanded. "And," she added, trying to force back tears, "all the time you were working at Helen's trousseau. Was there ever so much deceit in the world!"

Patty stood perfectly still, with her hands hanging by her sides. Her face was pale and her eyes were pitiful. You may have seen a dog stand before his master, with a guilty conscience, awaiting chastisement.

"You spoke honestly," said Mrs. Christopherson, with a sneer. "An unfortunate word! You plotted to rob Helen of her husband. I can sum it all up in a sentence. Josiah has money; you have no scruples."

Until now Patty had made little or no attempt to defend herself; but as if stung by the foul stroke, she was up in arms at once.

"His money is nothing to me," she cried. "Nothing. I have never given it a thought. It is odious to be spoken to in this way."



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“ Everything you have done is odious,” said Mrs. Christopherson. “ You have certainly missed your vocation. You may be unfitted to influence young girls, but nobody can deny you are an excellent actress. But why keep it up, now you haven’t an audience ? Of course,” she continued, “ my words are wasted. You are too callous. I have others to think of besides myself. You cannot stay here. Maurice is going to London to-morrow ; the best thing you can do is to accompany him. And until you leave the house you will keep to your own room.”

With this Mrs. Christopherson swept out of the room. Passing Helen’s door on the way to her own, she stopped to listen for some sound of movement behind it. She longed for a confidante of some kind. Hearing no sound, however, she concluded Helen was asleep and passed on.

But Helen lay awake in the dark. She had guessed that Maurice’s anticipations were by way of being fulfilled, from the expression of Mrs. Christopherson’s face when she returned alone from the garden. Hearing her mother

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pass to Patty's room, Helen put out her light and listened for Mrs. Christopherson's return. Then, springing out of bed, she put on her dressing-gown and stole swiftly along the corridor.

At the sight of Helen, Patty broke down. The two girls nestled together on the bed, their arms about each other, like two children.

"I—I was hoping you would come," Patty sobbed. "I am so thankful. Auntie has only just left me, and I—I am to go away to-morrow. She says I mustn't leave my room till then."

"Oh, what nonsense!" cried Helen. "Tell me what has been happening, Patty."

"Please don't pretend not to know," Patty entreated.

"Of course, I have known—something for a long time," said Helen, stroking her cousin's hair. "And Maurice knows, too. It was he who told me. The wonder is my mother could have been blind so long. Has Josiah asked you to marry him?" Helen added.

"How could he ask me?" demanded Patty, in a reproachful tone.

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“ He need not have studied me, dear. And it doesn't seem that he has studied me much, does it ? ”

Patty drew farther away, still sitting on the bed, but free from her cousin.

“ Are you angry with me, too ? ” she murmured.

“ Why should I be angry ? I told you I didn't intend to marry him. ”

Patty seemed to hesitate ; presently she said : “ I want you to understand the worst of me. I know I have done what mayn't be quite nice. But, ” she added, “ I—I loved him so ! ”

Helen felt almost ashamed to cherish a suspicion of Patty's good faith at this emotional moment. But she did so, nevertheless. She could not feel quite satisfied that Patty was sincere even now. She wondered whether her cousin was so thoroughly imbued with her *rôle* that she maintained it off the stage. For love Helen was in a mood to forgive much ; but the fact that Patty—or anybody else—could love Josiah seemed so extraordinary, that Helen was almost disposed to think Patty was acting still.

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"But, Patty," she said, "you hadn't seen him many times, and you had hardly spoken a dozen words to him before he came to Elderstrand."

"I had heard my aunt speak of him—and to him. I saw how you treated him," Patty exclaimed. "You all seemed to be making a dupe of him. And I felt so sorry for him. You both wanted his money; for himself nobody cared——"

"Except you," Helen retorted, a little cruelly, as she felt the truth of Patty's accusation.

"I liked him always," said Patty, "and I admired him."

"Ad—admired Josiah!" cried Helen incredulously.

"You can't believe that," said Patty. "Oh, how you are eaten up by your hateful, narrow prejudice! But I could feel all he had done. I knew what it was to be discontented and envious; but he was strong to obtain what he coveted, yet he had missed the best of life. I didn't see why he shouldn't be happy as well as you. I liked him, I respected him because

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he was strong, and I have never said a word about him I didn't mean."

"Then it is true you told me about Maurice in order to—to——"

"Yes, it is true," said Patty, rather defiantly. "I did it deliberately—of set purpose. I knew it was true, or I wouldn't have said it. Maurice did love you. He will make you happy, as Mr. Barbrook could never do. If you had really cared for him, I should not have come here. Only I knew you didn't. I believed and I still believe you contemplated a crime. I was not disinterested in trying to prevent it. When I was invited to Elderstrand, I saw my chance. I thought I could make him love me, and," said Patty, not without an air of triumph, "that is what I have done."

"But if he did not care, why did he ask me to marry him?" Helen suggested.

"Oh, of course, he admired you. Who could help admiring you? But what have you in common? You feel actually ashamed of all that is best in him. There is not a spark of sympathy between you."

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"Don't imagine I am finding fault," said Helen. "I was delighted to believe he didn't wish to marry me. I saw he wanted you, Patty, but I—I wondered whether you were attracted by him or his money."

"Have you ever heard me complain of want of money?" demanded Patty. "It proves how disastrous it must have been. You can't even conceive the possibility of loving him for himself."

"Still, I wish you hadn't told me that about Maurice," said Helen quietly.

"He has shown you it was true," was the retort.

"It may not have been true at that time," said Helen. "I can't help feeling something like a puppet. If you had not spoken as you did I might never——"

"You and Maurice were made for each other," Patty insisted. "Nothing will convince me you hadn't loved him always. You know, darling, they say we do unconsciously the things we do best. You breathe and walk without knowing it, until you catch a cold or sprain your foot."

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"Then, according to that, I don't love Maurice now so well as I did a month ago," said Helen.

"Ah, you know best about that," answered Patty.

"Where are you going to when you leave here—if you must leave?" asked Helen after a long silence.

"Miss Parfitt will take me in," said Patty, "and nothing could induce me to stay here. It was not very pleasant to be spoken to as I was just now; it was worse to feel I almost deserved it. Auntie says I have stolen your husband."

"I give him to you freely," cried Helen.

"Unconscious of the value of the gift," said Patty.

"Well," Helen suggested, "I think it is time I went to bed," and she bade her cousin good-night.

## CHAPTER XXIV

Helen rose earlier than usual the following morning, and going down-stairs before her mother was stirring, she went out to the lawn.

After staying there a few minutes for the sheer pleasure of inhaling the sea-borne air, she turned towards Patty's workroom, where, as she anticipated, she found Josiah.

With a gloomy expression he stood outside the unopened window, smoking a briar-root pipe.

"A lovely morning!" he cried, lifting his soft felt hat. "Miss Winter is later than usual."

"She isn't up yet," said Helen. "She is going away to-day."

"She said nothing about it last night," exclaimed Barbrook, and Helen drew nearer.

"I think it will simplify matters if I give you back this," she said.



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Taking her engagement ring from her finger, she placed it in his right hand. He stood looking down at his large palm.

"I have asked Patty to make the other things into a nice parcel," she exclaimed. "You shall have it after breakfast."

As he looked down at the ring, a smile broke over his face.

"Upon my word, I hardly know what to say, you know."

"Tell the truth, Mr. Barbrook."

"One mustn't always—Miss Christopher-son."

Their eyes met and they laughed together.

"Oh, I don't mind in the least," she cried. "You may as well admit you are very pleased."

He looked at her as she stood bareheaded in the sunshine, the ideal of youth and health, tall, straight, with parted lips and bright eyes.

"I can't say that without qualifying it," he answered. "I feel I have lost a very——"

"Oh, not at all."

"A very sweet and beautiful young lady," he said.

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Helen looked up into his face.

“ ‘ But you knows a nicerer,’ ” she retorted.

“ I—I beg your pardon,” he stammered, quite at a loss.

“ And now,” she said, “ our party will be broken up altogether. You will have to go directly after breakfast, you know; then Patty——”

“ Which is her train ? ”

“ The one-thirty,” Helen hazarded. “ And, Mr. Barbrook, I am going to make one final prayer—will you explain things very sweetly to my mother ? ”

“ Certainly. I will speak to Mrs. Christopherson at the earliest opportunity.”

Helen turned towards the house, but stopped again abruptly.

“ Oh, there’s something else I wanted to say,” she exclaimed. “ Patty is just the dearest girl in the world——”

“ I think she is,” said Barbrook.

“ If I were a man I should carry her off and marry her at once, as people do in plays, you know.”

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"You see, if you were a man," he said, "you would probably prove as irresistible as you are as a woman."

"If I were a man I should be too feeble for Patty," Helen rejoined. "Patty admires a strong character."

"Ah," said Josiah reflectively.

"She wouldn't at all admire a man who shilly-shallied for the sake of appearances, you know. There's the gong," she cried, and they both joined Mrs. Christopherson with radiant faces.

Mrs. Christopherson looked tired this morning. She ate very little breakfast and drank several cups of strong tea.

In answer to Maurice's remark on Patty's absence, she said that her niece was unable to be present, and immediately began to discuss the probability of rain. On leaving the breakfast-table, she sent Helen into the garden, thus affording her an opportunity to tell Maurice all that had occurred since she bade him good-night.

Then Mrs. Christopherson addressed herself to Barbrook. She was determined to act with

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a due regard to her dignity. A night's reflection had convinced her that nothing was to be gained by a reference to the encounter in the garden.

"I wish to speak to you about my daughter," she said, as soon as they were alone. "Will you kindly sit down?"

Barbrook, however, remained standing.

"I have had a conversation with Helen this morning," he returned.

Mrs. Christopherson waved her hand as if that did not count.

"I have considered the matter very thoroughly," she said, "and I am afraid I have no alternative but to tell you——"

"What Miss Christopherson has told me already, I presume."

"What was that?" she demanded.

"She has preferred to put an end to our engagement."

Mrs. Christopherson looked a little more annoyed. There appears to be a certain satisfaction in the imparting of information, quite apart from its character, and she wished that Helen had left it to her mother.

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"Since that is the case," she said, "there is nothing to add."

"Only that I have to thank you for your kindness and hospitality——"

"Affectation to pretend you care to avail yourself of it longer," Mrs. Christopherson suggested.

"I propose to start in three-quarters of an hour," said Josiah.

"Then I will order the carriage, Mr. Barbrook."

He went up-stairs to make ready, then dawdled about the house in the hope of seeing Patty before he set forth. Helen brought down-stairs the somewhat bulky parcel containing his accumulated presents, then the waggonette was driven to the door. He shook hands with Mrs. Christopherson, with Helen and Maurice, and the three stood at the door to see the last of him.

"Here endeth the first lesson," exclaimed Helen, walking towards the sycamore tree.

"And the second is about to begin," said Maurice, sitting down by her side.

"Oh, not yet."

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"The sooner the better, Nell."

"One must have a brief interval," she said, with a laugh.

"Meantime, how am I to see you?" he asked eagerly. "You understand I shall be rather busy. I can't spare time to come here——"

"We shall return in a month," she suggested.

"A month!"

"You used to stay away longer than that, when you might have come as often as you pleased," she said.

"Oh, well, we won't look back," he answered. "Don't you think it's rather pleasant to look forward, though?"

"How far?" she asked.

"What shall I say? Until you are my wife, anyhow."

Helen looked down at the grass.

"You have not asked me to be your wife," she murmured.

"I will ask you now."

"Oh, pray, pray don't do that!" she entreated.

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"Why not?"

"We should be obliged to tell my mother, and I am sure she has had enough to bear for one day. There is Sir Weston," Helen exclaimed, as he rode in at the gate.

"Papa!" said Maurice, with a laugh.

Sir Weston did not see Helen under the shade of the sycamore tree, but leaving his bicycle at the door, he met Mrs. Christopherson in the hall. She did her utmost to receive him as if she had not a care in the world, but when she had listened patiently to the minute details of his health, Mrs. Christopherson could not resist the temptation to confide her own anxieties in return.

Without specifying the precise method she had adopted, she related the shameful facts of the case, concluding with the startling announcement of Barbrook's departure.

Sir Weston shook his head in the most melancholy manner.

"Then that's all over!" he ejaculated. "And," he asked, "is Miss Winter still here?"

"Until half-past twelve. She and Maurice

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travel by the one-thirty train. You were quite right about Maurice——”

“ I understood Helen had vowed she would never marry the man,” cried Sir Weston.

“ So she did,” was the answer. “ But Patty has the effrontery to insist—I cannot understand it,” Mrs. Christopherson exclaimed. “ I really do *not* know whom to trust. But I am quite sure about one thing, Helen never shall marry Maurice.”

“ No, no, that would never do, Florence. Madness!”

“ I intend to wash my hands of both him and Patty,” Mrs. Christopherson continued. “ I have not said a word of reproach to Maurice; how can I in the circumstances?”

“ Still you could forgive Vaughan more easily than your niece?” Sir Weston suggested.

“ Forgive—I shall never forgive either of them. But,” she said, with an air of extreme determination, “ I shall be able to deal with Maurice when the time comes. The annoying thing is that Patty can’t be made to suffer.”



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"You think Barbrook will marry her?" asked Sir Weston.

"I am afraid so. Of course, it is impossible to tell. One thing, she will be compelled to leave him alone now. After all," Mrs. Christopherson added, "Helen may make a far better match in the end."

"Humph!" ejaculated Sir Weston, in a discontented tone.

"We shall see what next season brings forth, Weston."

"Ah—er—yes."

Sir Weston did not stay much longer. He paid little attention to loose stones in the road as he returned to his hotel at Rookingham. His mind was occupied by far more important matters. Mrs. Christopherson assumed as a matter of course that Helen should migrate with her to Grosvenor Square. It would prove a thankless task to undeceive her.

He determined, however, to brace himself for the ordeal, and that quickly. His health would not bear the present uncertainty. Tomorrow, at the latest, he would come to a definite understanding with Florence.

## CHAPTER XXV

On reaching Rookingham railway station Josiah went at once to the stationmaster's office and reserved a first-class compartment in the one-thirty train up. He then took his stand at the door of the booking office to watch for Patty. The morning passed slowly. Barbrook smoked several cigars, but he did not move from his post until he saw the wagonette, with the lean gray horse between its shafts, ascending the hill at a snail's pace.

Patty was alone with the coachman; Maurice, warned by Helen, having made an excuse to alight near the town, and intending to travel by a later train. Helen had warned Patty, too, that Barbrook would be at the station, so that she schooled herself to meet him as if his presence was quite a matter of course.

Barbrook helped her to alight, he saw her trunk labelled, and at once led the way to the compartment he had reserved.

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"My return ticket is third class," Patty expostulated ; but assuring her that it was all right, he opened the door and entered after her. She leaned back in her corner, watching the bustle on the platform, neither speaking until the train started. Then Barbrook leaned forward from his opposite seat.

"I'm afraid you've been having rather a bad time of it," he said.

"I—I can't talk about it," she answered, shrinking backwards.

"I don't see that," he said. "I've an idea you'd better talk about it quite candidly, you know. I'm beginning to hope there's nothing you and I can't talk about candidly. Have you heard that everything's over between me and Helen?" he asked.

"Yes; she told me."

"We had been getting a little mixed," he continued, "and I'm not going to make any bones about it now. I had only one fear, and that was that Helen might want to stick to her bargain. But I fancy Mrs. Christopher-son's been making things rather warm for you."

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Tears filled Patty's eyes.

"She refused to say good-bye to me," she faltered. "She wouldn't even see me before I started. I am sure she will never speak to me again."

"Does that matter very much?" Barbrook asked cheerfully.

"She and Helen are the only people who belong to me," said Patty.

"Helen doesn't bear you a grudge, anyhow," he insisted. "She was kind enough to give me some very excellent advice this morning."

"What—what was that?"

"She said if she were a man she'd just carry you away and marry you at once. Now I call that sensible," he said. "And," Barbrook added, "it's what I want to do if you'll let me."

Patty leaned back and looked through the window at the passing fields. They were beginning to look sunny again. Her tears ceased, and she forgot both her aunt's and her own reproaches.

"What I always liked about you," he said, "was your downright honesty. Now, I want

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you to tell me straight. I'm not very thin-skinned——"

She mustered a laugh.

"You are one of the most sensitive persons I know," she returned.

"Anyhow, I want to know how things stand," he said. "I don't know exactly how to put it, but it's like this. You seem, somehow, to be the other half of me; and whatever you tell me, I'd like to marry you all the same and chance it, if you'll have me. I'd be thankful if you'd come to me. I feel like that. At the worst, I think we could jog along together."

"Jog along!"

"You know what I mean; you always do. I'm almost afraid to think of it, and yet that's what I have dared; but if you can tell me honestly you—well, that you love me——"

"I think I can," she answered, looking frankly into his face.

He shifted his seat, coming to sit by her side. The rest of the journey passed like a dream, and at its end he knew that it was a true one.

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He hailed a cab and followed Patty into it, directing the driver to Miss Parfitt's house at Bayswater.

"When can we be married?" he asked.

"Of course, I shall have to give a term's notice, at least," she answered.

But Barbrook would not hear of waiting until the Christmas holidays.

"I tell you what," he said, after a long and fervent remonstrance, "I shall see Miss Parfitt. What time shall I come to-morrow?"

After some hesitation she appointed four o'clock, and then the cab stopped. Barbrook bade Patty good-bye, and she surprised little Miss Parfitt by appearing suddenly before her.

She had to beg for shelter until the school reassembled, and, of course, some sort of explanation became necessary. When she announced her engagement to Josiah and her aunt's disapproval, Miss Parfitt looked very grave indeed. She sincerely hoped he was a suitable person.

"He is coming to see you to-morrow," said Patty. "He is very anxious to know you. I feel sure you will like him."

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Although Miss Parfitt was one of the least mercenary of women, when she heard more about Josiah's position, she began to form a favourable opinion of him. She kissed Patty and said she should be pleased to receive Mr. Barbrook at four o'clock to-morrow.

"It is fortunate the young ladies have not returned," she added.

## CHAPTER XXVI

Mrs. Christopherson knew when she was beaten.

She was humanly eager to turn the tables and to wreak vengeance on her foes; she would willingly have relegated both Maurice and Patty to torment. It galled her to realise that she could not hinder Patty's marriage, and it was still more annoying to be compelled to believe that this promised to turn out very happily. Where Helen might have been critical, Patty would remain blissfully ignorant of the slightest shortcoming; and even if she was a hypocrite, a fact which Mrs. Christopherson never doubted, she would continue to practise hypocrisy and Barbrook might never be disillusioned.

But with the general exodus Mrs. Christopherson desired the incident to end. She had no wish for an intestine war, Sir Weston hav-



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ing already been too much confronted with her domestic perplexities.

Mrs. Christopherson determined to put an end to this; she would declare an amnesty, and extend toleration to Helen, whose immediate marriage, perhaps, seemed less vitally important since her own engagement.

It appeared that the time had come for this to be announced, and whilst Sir Weston at his hotel at Rookingham was fortifying himself to break the news of his absolutely unalterable determination, ironic fate decided that Mrs. Christopherson should be engaged in the composition of a paragraph which she at once despatched to the editor of the "Morning Post."

The paragraph announced that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, between Sir Weston Saville, Bart., and Mrs. Christopherson, and now that it was despatched, its author went to the drawing-room and sent for Helen.

"Shut the door and sit down," she said, in her most amiable manner. "I have some news for you."

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Helen obediently shut the door and took a chair.

"Sir Weston will be here this afternoon," said Mrs. Christopherson.

"He seems to be here every day," Helen answered.

"The fact is, he has asked me to marry him, Helen. The wedding will take place rather soon. I did not tell you earlier, because I wished to get yours over first. I have been rather cruelly disappointed, but we won't go over that again. Of course, my marriage will be immensely to your advantage," said Mrs. Christopherson.

Helen was not surprised, and she certainly did not feel pleased. She entertained a very decided, and perhaps ridiculous, opinion that her mother ought to remain a widow until the end of her days. She tried, however, to throw as much sympathy as possible into her congratulations, and Mrs. Christopherson was neither very expectant nor exacting in this regard.

Then Helen walked to the window and stood staring out at the lawn. The present seemed

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to be an excellent opportunity for a step which she had contemplated for the past twenty-four hours.

It weighed on her mind that she had practically deceived her mother. She had not intended deceit. She had felt very much in earnest at the time, though she wished now that she had not uttered her thoughts quite so impulsively.

"Mother," she said, facing about presently.

"Yes, darling."

"There's something I want to tell you."

"What is it, Helen?" asked Mrs. Christopherson.

"You remember—the other day—you spoke to me about Maurice," said Helen, crimsoning.

"There is no need to remind me of his existence," cried Mrs. Christopherson. "I would far rather forget it—and all unpleasant things."

This was not encouraging, but still Helen determined to persist.

"Sometimes one says things," she continued, "meaning them at the time, you know, Mother, but—I think it was rather reckless of

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me;" and she stepped nearer, standing before Mrs. Christopherson, a picture of charming confusion.

"Kindly speak plainly; tell me what you are driving at," exclaimed Mrs. Christopherson becoming anxious.

"I said that nothing could induce me—that I should never marry Maurice."

"You told the truth," said Mrs. Christopherson, acidly.

"I—I don't think I did—at least, I said exactly what I meant, but——"

"You need not enter into details," Mrs. Christopherson answered. "You will never marry Maurice with my consent. I imagine even you would scarcely think of marrying without it. Do you mean to tell me he has had the audacity to ask you to marry him?"

Helen hesitated a few moments. She wished to be perfectly frank. Had he asked her to be his wife or not? At all events, it appeared that she had consented.

"He intends to see you in a few weeks, time," she answered. "He has bought a large practice at South Kensington, and——"

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"He may save himself the trouble," cried Mrs. Christopherson. "Nothing in the world will ever induce me to consent. Nothing in the world," she repeated with every symptom of finality.

"Why should you refuse?" Helen demanded.

"Pray do not catechise me!"

"Surely I have a right to ask your reason, Mother."

"I have reason enough," was the answer. "He has acted abominably, deceitfully, like anything but a gentleman. You may disabuse your mind at once. My own is quite made up. I shall never speak to Maurice again."

Helen perceived the futility of further argument in Mrs. Christopherson's present state of mind. She left the room with melancholy forebodings, and while the obstacle to happiness seemed trivially insufficient, she realised it might be hard to surmount. If it came to the point, she could scarcely marry Maurice in the face of her mother's opposition. She had refused to marry Josiah merely to please Mrs. Christopherson, and in that Helen felt justi-

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fied; but to become Maurice's wife without the maternal sanction seemed utterly inconceivable.

At four o'clock that afternoon Sir Weston was announced.

He had schooled himself for his unthankful task. He would throw an anticipatory coolness into his greeting, merely shaking her hand, and so preparing her for what was to follow.

It was perplexing to find her in a very enticing mood. She looked very handsome, very bright, extraordinarily young for Helen's mother. She offered both hands and her lips: agreeable enough, but not in Sir Weston's programme to-day.

She led him to the sofa, and sat down close by his side, whereas, aware of his own weakness, he had warned himself that safety lay in distance. With admirable coyness she informed him that an announcement would appear in to-morrow's "Morning Post," and Sir Weston not only found that his own announcement must be postponed, but he caught fire at her warmth.

"And," Mrs. Christopherson said, "I

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thought whilst I was about it, I might as well tell Helen."

"What did she say?" he asked, with a downcast air.

"Oh, she congratulated me as warmly as I expected. I pointed out that our marriage would be to her advantage as well as ours, Weston."

"Of course, of course," he said, realising that retreat was becoming more difficult.

"Unfortunately," Mrs. Christopherson continued, "I had to speak my mind very plainly to Helen."

"What about?"

"About Maurice Vaughan. It appears," she said contemptuously, "there is some kind of clandestine understanding between them."

"Vaughan ought to be kicked!" cried Sir Weston. "You should let me deal with him."

"I am quite capable of dealing with him," said Mrs. Christopherson.

"Ah, he requires a man to talk to him," Sir Weston insisted. "Let me give him a look up at his hospital."

"I understand he has left the hospital."

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"But I always thought——"

"He has purchased a practice," Mrs. Christopherson explained.

"I understood he was a pauper."

"He had a hundred and fifty a year from Consols."

"So he has bought a practice!" exclaimed Sir Weston gleefully.

"In order to prevail upon Helen to marry him," said Mrs. Christopherson severely. "But that she shall never do if I have a voice in the matter."

Sir Weston stayed unusually late that afternoon, and he no longer struggled against his warmer emotions. Now he perceived the solution of his difficulty, and in her prospective step-father Helen had unconsciously found an ally.

So that she married somebody who could support her, he did not care who the man might be. If Maurice Vaughan possessed a practice, that ought to be sufficient. Mrs. Christopherson must have pressure put upon her to give way. Sir Weston determined to consult Maurice concerning his own dire dis-



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eases; ne would recommend him to his friends; furnish a house for him; do anything, in fact, within reasonable bounds to facilitate the young man's marriage.

That evening Sir Weston broke through his dietary. He ordered an imperial pint of champagne, lying awake late into the night imagining all kinds of penalties in consequence.

## CHAPTER XXVII

One morning, more than a fortnight after Miss Winter's expulsion from Elderstrand, Josiah Barbrook alighted from a hansom at the door of a house in Francis Street, Tottenham Court Road, and hearing that Maurice had gone away, inquired for his present address.

Receiving one of Maurice's new cards from the servant, and seeing that the address was at South Kensington, Barbrook postponed his visit until later in the day. On leaving his office at four o'clock, he was driven to the house, which presented a great contrast to that in Francis Street. Maurice had obviously made a move for the better. The door was opened by a neat housemaid, and the visitor entered a well-appointed consulting-room.

A minute later he was joined by Maurice, wearing a frock coat and an expression of professional gravity.

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"Ah, you thought to find a patient," cried Josiah, wringing his hand.

"You don't look much like one," said Maurice. "Suppose we go into another room," he added, not reluctant to show Barbrook as much of his new house as possible. It looked comfortable. A tea-cup stood at the corner of the table, an open magazine beside it.

"I have only just come in from my round," said Maurice, with an air of some importance. "You'll have some tea."

The bell was rung and a fresh supply ordered.

"So you've altered your line," suggested Barbrook. "I understood you intended to stay at the hospital till you died."

"Well, I did," Maurice admitted.

"But now you're going to make a big income, and ambition may go hang."

"A man can't eat his pie and have it, you see," said Maurice. "I have burnt my boats."

"One might guess the reason——"

"Oh, well, I'm not in a position to say anything about that at present," was the answer.

"Have you seen Patty?" Maurice inquired.

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“The fact is, I’ve seen her every day. We have arranged to be married this day week. A very quiet affair,” said Barbrook. “Just ourselves, Miss Parfitt, and you, I hope. I want you to be my best man.”

Maurice smiled at the recollection of something of the kind which Mrs. Christopherson suggested at Elderstrand. He assented cordially, received the necessary information as to time and place, and the next day purchased a wedding present for Patty.

This invitation had a disturbing effect upon him. Whilst the union of Barbrook and Patty seemed a fitting sequel to events at Elderstrand, the consequences could not be regarded as complete until Helen also was provided for. His house was ready. It required a mistress. Maurice dwelt upon the subject so constantly that at last he could restrain himself no longer. He determined to approach Mrs. Christopherson, from whom he did not apprehend any serious opposition.

The day previous to Patty’s wedding he called at Grandison Street during the afternoon, and heard that Mrs. Christopherson had

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returned from Elderstrand, though she was not at home at the moment. Helen, however, was in the drawing-room.

She rose impulsively to meet him, but Maurice noticed that her face looked rather pale and thin. For a few moments they scarcely spoke. Everything gave way to the joy of meeting.

"You have heard the news?" said Helen presently.

"About your mother and Saville?"

"I expect her home every minute," she answered.

"Then we mustn't waste time, Nell."

"Tell me about Patty," she insisted. "Have you seen her?"

He explained that he had seen Barbrook, that the wedding was to take place to-morrow, and that he had been invited to be present.

"But for that," he said, with a cheerful laugh, "I am not sure I should have come quite so soon."

"It is quite useless to plead Patty's cause——"

"Oh, I'm not rash enough to attempt that,"

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he returned. "Besides, I imagine that Patty is fairly contented with things as they are. But it tantalized me, Nell. It is my own cause—our cause I want to plead."

"Nothing could be more hopeless than that, Maurice."

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh, my mother is very bitter against you. She declares she will never speak to you again."

"She will have to speak to me, anyhow," he answered.

"I'm afraid she won't say anything agreeable," said Helen, rather wistfully.

As she spoke a cab drove to the street door, and they heard the bell ring. Maurice stepped a yard farther away from Helen as the door opened, then, with a smile on his face, he awaited Mrs. Christopherson's greeting.

She stopped a few inches from the threshold, and if she could have had her wish at that moment, no doubt, Maurice's career had come to an untimely and tragic end.

"This is a visit I scarcely anticipated," she exclaimed in her most frigid tone.

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"I have looked forward to it for some time," said Maurice.

"Perhaps you will tell me at once what brings you here," she demanded.

"In the first place, I have to congratulate you," he rejoined. "And I wanted to tell you that Helen has promised to be my wife."

"Subject to my approval, I presume," said Mrs. Christopherson, with a cold glance at Helen, who stood white and mute, with her eyes on Maurice.

"I have assured her you will not withhold it," he exclaimed.

"I decline to discuss the subject," said Mrs. Christopherson. "I can only say this: I would sooner see Helen dead at my feet than allow her to marry you."

She spoke with the air of a queen of tragedy, or at least of melodrama. No utterance could be too strong or too final. Impotent to retaliate on Patty, who, in a manner which almost raised doubts as to the wise government of the universe, seemed to be actually rewarded for her misconduct, Mrs. Christopherson turned all her just wrath on Maurice's luckless head.

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As if to point the moral, she swept across the room and rang the bell.

Maurice looked and felt entirely disconcerted. He had many overwhelming arguments in his mind, but he perceived it were as easy to control a hurricane by persuasion as Mrs. Christopherson at that moment. With a quick glance at Helen, who stood dazed under her mother's invective, Maurice walked out of the room and down-stairs to the door.

On the step he encountered Sir Weston, whom, in his present mood, he passed with a silent nod.

A glance at Maurice's face was sufficient to awaken Sir Weston's worst fears. Although Mrs. Christopherson had always caught fire on the rare occasions when he tentatively mentioned Vaughan's name, Sir Weston still felt confident that his influence would not ultimately be exerted in vain.

On entering the drawing-room he found Florence alone and in a state of extreme agitation.

"I met Vaughan on the doorstep," he said, taking her hand.

"Yes," she answered petulantly.



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"I hope you haven't been making a mistake, Florence."

"I have told Dr. Vaughan what I think of him."

"Ah!" Sir Weston ejaculated significantly.

"He had the effrontery to tell me that Helen had promised to be his wife!" she exclaimed, sinking into a chair.

"Well?" he asked, controlling an impulse to betray his satisfaction.

"I said I would sooner see her dead at my feet——"

"Oh, come, that was rather strong, you know," Sir Weston remonstrated.

His round face looked greatly distressed again. He perceived that he stood in a painful position. Loath as he felt to back out of his engagement, even this seemed better than to saddle himself with Helen. The difficulty was, that he shrank from speaking an unpleasant word to Florence, who appealed to his admiration even when she was out of temper. Sir Weston realised that a crisis had arrived, that it required the exercise of consummate tact, whereas he hardly felt equal to the occasion.

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"I meant it," Mrs. Christopherson insisted.  
"I meant every word I spoke."

"No, no, Florence. I am sure you don't mean it," he urged.

"Well," she said, throwing out her hands with a despairing gesture, "if you don't believe me, I can't help it. Nothing shall compel me to see him again as long as I live."

"If that's the case I'm sorry," answered Sir Weston, and with much deliberation he buttoned his coat.

"I really don't see why you should be sorry!" she retorted.

"A fellow-feeling makes one wondrous kind, you know. I suppose he has been fond of Helen for years. I have gone through a similar experience."

"That must have been before I knew you," she suggested.

"It began very soon after, Florence."

"I am sorry," she exclaimed, "but I am really unable to treat it as a jest."

"Never more serious in my life," he insisted. "Years ago I made up my mind you were the only woman I should marry."

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"There was nothing to prevent you from asking me—at least."

"Indeed there was," he returned. "A difficulty that seemed insurmountable. The fact is, it was Helen."

"Helen!" cried Mrs. Christopherson, completely startled.

"You see," he said, "I wanted a wife; I wanted you, Florence. But I couldn't undertake the responsibility of your daughter. I am speaking quite frankly——"

"You certainly are speaking frankly!" she retorted.

"You remember I was constantly leaving London; partly because of my shocking health, partly because I doubted my power of resistance. I determined never to ask you to marry me until Helen was off your hands, and as soon as I heard she was engaged to Barbrook I—well, you know how I acted, Florence."

"Then Mr. Barbrook's defection was a disappointment to you as well as to me?" she suggested.

"Until I discovered that there was no impediment in Vaughan's case."

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"No impediment!" she exclaimed.

"Anyhow, you understand how it is. I have a sort of sympathy with the fellow. I am a man who lives by rule. Once I form a plan it takes a good deal to interrupt it. I gave up port two years ago. I am fond of port. I have some very pretty wine in my cellars, but I sit and watch my friends drink it, and I stick to Hock—you understand?"

She quite understood.

"You will let me give you some tea," she suggested, as he seemed on the point of going.

"Afraid I can't stay now," he said, "but I will turn up to-morrow morning if you will be at home?"

"Oh, yes, I shan't go out before luncheon."

"By that time," said Sir Weston, "I hope you will have reconsidered your position."

Between Maurice and Sir Weston poor Mrs. Christopherson felt she was being torn in two. Saville's explanation had taken her completely by surprise; but she could not disguise the fact that, in spite of his diplomatic courtesy, he had issued what was practically an ultimatum.

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Well, she was not the woman to yield to a threat. If he expected her to humiliate herself to the dust, he would be vastly mistaken. Tea being brought in, and Helen not appearing, Mrs. Christopherson presently went to her daughter's room. She found Helen seated in an arm-chair, with dull, tearless pain on her face.

"Won't you have some tea?" she asked, not unkindly.

"No, thank you," answered Helen.

"I am sorry if you are unhappy," said Mrs. Christopherson, "but it is the kindest to allow no possibility of misunderstanding."

"There is not much fear of that," was the answer.

"I did not intend there to be any," Mrs. Christopherson continued. "But as I have said, I am sorry to pain you——"

"Then," cried Helen, starting to her feet, "why do you pain me? What have I done? What has Maurice done?"

"You ask me that!"

"He knew—you yourself told him the moment he reached Elderstrand—that I had re-

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fused to marry Josiah. Then how was he to blame?"

"My poor child," said her mother, resting a hand on her shoulder, "I can't argue with you. When I remember how he used to listen to me—there, it drives me mad! To think of the way he was acting behind my back! It was a revelation to me. I had no idea there could be such deceit in the world. As I told him, I would rather see you——"

"Oh, pray don't say it again," cried Helen, shuddering.

Mrs. Christopherson stepped towards the door, but after opening it she hesitated.

"Did you—did you hear any news of your cousin?" she asked, curiosity gaining the upper hand.

"Patty is to be married to-morrow," said Helen.

"And Maurice Vaughan will be at the wedding, no doubt."

"Yes, Mother."

Mrs. Christopherson left the room, with her head in the air. If anything were needed to aggravate her ill-humour it was this.

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She had not for a moment dreamed of yielding to Helen or to Weston ; but if she had entertained such a thought, the news of Patty's impending marriage would have thrust it aside.

Mrs. Christopherson could not turn the other cheek to the smiter. Her Christianity was too modern to permit that.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

The following day was propitiously sunny for the bride, though Maurice felt hardly in a mood suitable to a wedding guest. He and Miss Parfitt were the only spectators, and Patty wore the dress in which a few hours later she was to set forth to Paris. Maurice carried the ring in his pocket, Miss Parfitt gave the bride away, and at her house a meal was prepared for the party, with a wedding cake quite out of proportion to its number.

But, as Miss Parfitt said, each of the young ladies would expect a piece. Such a surprise Miss Winter's wedding would be to them all. She asked Maurice to propose the health of the bride and groom, which he did in as few words as possible, Miss Parfitt rising to drink to it with more than due solemnity. It was after this, while Josiah was talking to his host-



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ess, that Maurice found an opportunity for a few words with Patty.

"My husband," she said, with a rather important air, "tells me you have quite a large practice."

"The practice is all right," he answered, "but I'm afraid I have put the cart before the horse."

"Have you seen my aunt?" asked Mrs. Barbrook.

"Yesterday."

"What did she say?"

When he told her, they were both silent for a few moments.

"I am sorry," said Patty. "I feel so happy to-day, as if I had everything in the world I could wish for, that I should like to be able to bid you hope."

"Things don't look very hopeful," Maurice rejoined. "Mrs. Christopherson's objection seems unreasonable; it may prove fatal all the same. I try to persuade myself she will change her mind——"

"She is not clever at changing, Maurice, and I am afraid you are the scapegoat."

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"Well, don't let me make you miserable to-day," he said. "Barbrook is beginning to look impatient."

"My husband and I both hope you will come to see us as soon as we return," she suggested.

"Indeed I shall."

"I hope you will bring good news. Perhaps you may even bring Helen."

"Ah, that is cruelly tantalizing," he said.

He stood on the doorstep to see them driven away. Miss Parfitt insisted on pouring an uncomfortable handful of rice over the bride as she bade her good-bye. Amidst laughter and tears Patty entered the brougham, Barbrook followed, and the horses started.

"Dear me," said Miss Parfitt, as Maurice offered his hand, "it seems to have become very dull suddenly. I can't tell you how I shall miss her, Dr. Vaughan. Miss Winter, or Mrs. Barbrook, as I ought to call her, has lived with me nearly eighteen years, a long time," she said, with a sigh. "I have seen her in all kinds of circumstances, and if ever a man had a dear little woman for his wife, it's her husband."

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Tears ran down Miss Parfitt's cheeks as she said good-bye, and as Maurice walked away from the house, he could not help contrasting this opinion with Mrs. Christopherson's. For his own part, he liked Patty unequivocally, and if she had played for her own hand, it was hardly for him to blame her. Concerning one fact he felt no doubt, these two were admirably mated. She was able to appreciate her husband's virtues, while she remained blissfully ignorant of those superficial defects which some persons might regard as worse than vices. With ordinary good fortune they ought to be happy together.

Then Maurice's thoughts dwelled miserably on his own prospects as he continued his way homewards.

## CHAPTER XXIX

Sir Weston Saville had spent an unhappy evening. He fretted at the threatened disarrangement of his plans. He had parted from Florence, possessed by a determination to have his own way.

She seemed to be flying in the face of Providence. To refuse to avail herself of such a fortunate opportunity to dispose of her daughter was positively wicked. It was a mere matter of temper and prejudice. Not that he felt disposed to press heavily on this score. He did not imagine that Florence was an angel; he knew she was a very charming woman, whilst Sir Weston had not reached his present age without the consciousness of certain infirmities on his own part.

As the evening wore on, the eve of Patty's wedding, he stood aghast at the possibility of

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a lonely future. He had become accustomed to her intimate companionship, and life began to wear a melancholy aspect without it.

Towards dinner time Sir Weston asked himself whether he had not gone a little too far. Had he magnified a molehill until it became a mountain? Would it be very intolerable to receive Helen into his household? He perceived she had changed of late; she had become quieter, more tractable. She was a very charming girl, and next season ought certainly to see her married, as, indeed, Florence had hinted.

So that, at the worst, he would not have to put up with her for long; whereas, at his time of life, with uncertain health, it seemed lamentable to waste a year's happiness.

It became a question, fatal to digestion, whether the sum of pleasure would not be greater with Mrs. Christopherson plus Helen, than without her altogether.

Of course, she might yield, but her manner had not promised anything of the kind. He feared he had affronted her, and wished he had been rather more cautious.

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For Helen's welfare he made no pretence to care. Sir Weston was unaffectedly self-regarding. Now it had come to the point, he shrank from maintaining the bold front he had prided himself on assuming a few hours earlier, and before he slept that night his mind was made up. Unless Mrs. Christopherson greeted him with a surrender, he would generously waive his claim; he would, in fact, sacrifice anything to hasten his marriage; as to Helen, he must make the best of her, and hope to get her off his hands within a year.

In this mood, it was no wonder that he thought Mrs. Christopherson looked more fascinating than usual. A slight reserve in her greeting appeared no drawback; he enjoyed the prospect of wooing her back to cordiality. Her face had never pleased him better, nor had her figure ever looked more entrancing.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, and taking a chair close to her own, he began to remark upon the weather.

"It is my niece's wedding-day," Mrs. Christopherson added, a little bitterly.

### *THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN*

"Ah," he ejaculated, and drew down the corners of his mouth sympathetically.

Then there followed a short silence. Sir Weston, whilst impatient to come to the point, yet held his hand on the off chance of her capitulation.

If Mrs. Christopherson had only known what was passing in his mind! She never did know. At least she was spared that.

She felt convinced he was adamant. In the still watches of the night Mrs. Christopherson had fought a great fight. She laid her head, aching somewhat, on the pillow, firm in her determination to suffer if necessary, but at all costs to stick to her colours. No earthly consideration should induce her to speak to Maurice Vaughan again as long as she lived. She could not sleep. She turned from side to side, and her thoughts broke free from control. The numerous air-castles she had built, habitations for Lady Saville, appeared in a kind of mirage. The congratulations she had received tormented her like a tinnitus. At one o'clock she rose and lighted the gas, put on her dressing-gown, and sought to compose her

## *THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN*

mind by reading. But the book fell open on her knees, though by degrees her brain cooled, and she began to regard the situation with her usual clear-sightedness.

Why should she compel herself to suffer for Maurice's offence? That was what it amounted to. The bare contemplation of his marriage to Helen, however, threw her back into a state of agitation.

Yet her own marriage hung upon his. It was a terrible crisis in Mrs. Christopherson's life, but she bravely faced it.

A mere matter of feeling after all! She began to dwell on Helen's happiness until nothing seemed more desirable. Marriage, after all, should be a matter for individual decision; there ought to be a limit to the authority of parents.

Mrs. Christopherson fancied she might at last be able to sleep. She put out the gas and lay down, but she could not yet forget her suspense. Suspense! She was startled to realise it had come to this.

After a long widowhood, it had been pleasant to feel there was again someone with



## THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN

whom she stood first. The house in Grosvenor Square, refurnished, was all that a woman could desire.

Mrs. Christopherson fell asleep, and as she dressed the next morning her decision was made.

Precisely how it was arrived at she never quite appreciated. She probably believes now that she was actuated by a kindly feeling towards her daughter.

At breakfast she greeted Helen as if there had been no unpleasantness yesterday, as if nothing uncommon was to happen to-day. She awaited Sir Weston's arrival with an impatience equal to his own, little dreaming of the revolution in his mind since she parted from him yesterday afternoon.

"I think," she said, "you were a little cruel about Helen yesterday."

"I was beastly selfish," Sir Weston admitted. "I want you all to myself, you know."

"How long will that last?"

"As long as I live, Florence," he answered; then rising, he came towards her chair. "I

## *THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN*

don't intend to leave the house until you name the day for our wedding," he said.

She did not doubt that he took her surrender as a matter of course. She smiled at his assurance, but not with disapproval.

"I don't know that I can do that," she said.

"Why not?" he asked, assuming that she would understand that his ultimatum was to be ignored.

"I can't very well order Maurice to marry Helen out of hand," she answered, with a laugh, for Mrs. Christopherson knew no half measures. She had no suspicion that she was making an unnecessary sacrifice, while all that Sir Weston could do at the moment was to refrain from betraying his astonishment. As it happened, he was to have everything his own way. He naturally rejoiced at the turn events had taken, and it was luncheon time before he left Grandison Street.

Then Mrs. Christopherson summoned Helen.

"My dear girl," she said, "I can't bear to see you look so miserable."

"You can hardly expect me to look very cheerful," Helen answered.

### *THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN*

"Well, that is what I do expect, dear. The fact is, I have been discussing matters with Sir Weston——"

Helen darted a pitiful glance at her mother's face.

"I have had a severe struggle with myself," Mrs. Christopherson continued. "Yesterday I meant every word I said——"

"Tell me you don't mean it to-day!" cried Helen.

"I can't pretend to feel pleased with Maurice," was the answer. "But I intend to sink my own feelings—very natural feelings, I think. I believe Maurice will make you happy, and what else do you imagine I live for?"

Helen fell on her neck and wept. Mrs. Christopherson bent her head, kissed her daughter's hair, and inconsistent tears ran down her own face.

But Mrs. Christopherson was inconsistent. She felt quite glad to see Helen happy. It is true she had experienced no such desire yesterday, but yesterday had little to do with to-day.

## THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN

When Helen went to be alone with her new happiness, Mrs. Christopherson wrote a letter.

"My dear Maurice," she began, and signed it "Yours very sincerely."

On her way down-stairs to the late luncheon, she despatched the letter by hand. During the meal little was said, but on rising, Mrs. Christopherson rested a hand on Helen's shoulder.

"When I decide to do a thing," she said, "I always do it thoroughly. I have asked Maurice to come, and I suppose he will not lose much time. He may arrive at any moment. I intend to let bygones be bygones. I shall treat him as if nothing had happened to weaken my respect. And, Helen, if Maurice wishes to be married soon, I shall raise no objection."

Helen now began to look for his coming. He would find the letter on his return from Patty's wedding. It was three o'clock, and he ought to be at Grandison Street soon.

She changed her dress and attended to her hair. By half-past three she was waiting in her room for Mrs. Christopherson's summons.

Four o'clock struck and he had not come.

### *THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN*

At half-past four she went down-stairs to tea. Five o'clock, and still no sign of Maurice. Mrs. Christopherson began to look anxious. He must have reached home after the wedding long ago. At six Helen also began to wonder.

## CHAPTER XXX

On reaching home after Patty's wedding, Maurice's first question was, as usual, whether anybody had called for him.

The servant handed him a white slate which bore the names of two patients.

"A letter as well, sir," she said.

"Whistle for a hansom," answered Maurice, at the same time breaking the seal of his letter, without looking at the envelope. As soon as his eyes fell upon the contents he stepped backwards.

The servant was whistling shrilly on the doorstep, but when the cab arrived, Maurice was sorely tempted to neglect his patients and order the driver to Grandison Street forthwith. He resisted the temptation, however, and on his way he read Mrs. Christopherson's letter again and again.

That she should address him as "My dear

## *THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN*

Maurice," after the manner she had treated him yesterday, seemed at first inconceivable, and it took some time to convince him that she really desired to see him, when he recollected that she preferred to see Helen dead at her feet rather than his wife.

His first visit was to one of his most remunerative patients, an elderly valetudinarian, who detained him half an hour, maundering hypochondriacally. The next proved to be a serious case, a matter of life or death, and Maurice could not leave the house until seven o'clock.

Then, promising to return in an hour, he lost no time in reaching Grandison Street, where he found Mrs. Christopherson alone in the drawing-room. Though she held forth her right hand in a friendly manner, her smile was not entirely free from bitterness.

"I daresay you were surprised to receive my letter," she said, after a moment's embarrassed silence.

"I am sorry I could not answer it before," he replied.

"Ah, I can guess what has detained you."

## THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN

"A patient——"

"You have been to my niece's wedding," she said, pressing her lips firmly together the next moment.

"I hope you are going to call on Mrs. Barbrook," Maurice suggested.

"We won't begin any unpleasant discussions to-day," she answered. "And, of course, since I have sent for you, it isn't likely you will heed my protestations. You know," Mrs. Christopherson added, "you are by way of being treated a great deal better than you deserve."

"I hope so," said Maurice.

"I still think you have behaved atrociously," she continued, "but I have promised to forget it—at least to try. Now, you would like to see Helen," said Mrs. Christopherson, with a benignant smile.

"If I may," he cried eagerly. It seemed all very different from yesterday.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I have withdrawn my opposition. You have proved quite too much for me amongst you. I will send Helen," she added, going towards the door.

Mrs. Christopherson had scarcely left the



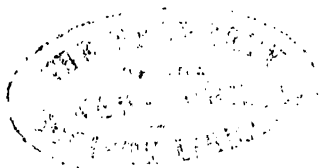
*Speaker:* "It is not often that we get a story the workmanship of which is so admirable as is that of 'Mr. Passingham.' . . . Here we must leave the story, contenting ourselves with a word of strong praise of the admirable way in which Mr. Cobb has told it."

*Standard:* "'Mr. Passingham' contains some clever sketches of character and a still more clever situation."

*St. James Gazette:* "Mr. Cobb allows the characters to tell their own story, and they perform this feat so surprisingly well that the reader is carried along at a breakneck pace, and is constrained to finish the book at a sitting. We have nothing but praise for this entertaining, racy story, which is constructed with considerable skill, and is as charmingly written as it is piquant and clever."



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